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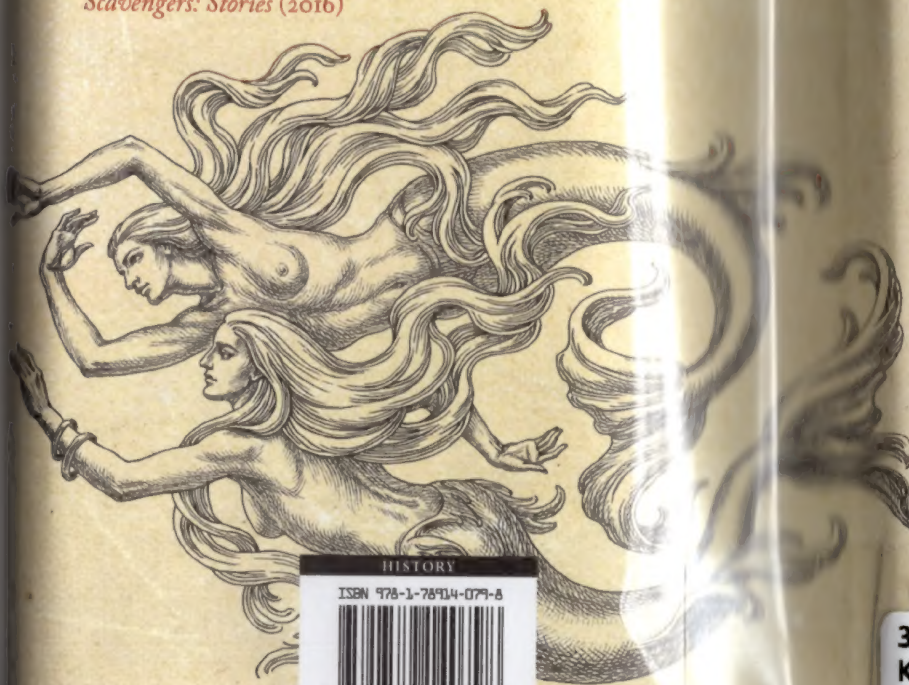
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'John Kachuba has written a terrifically entertaining exploration of shapeshifting, from ancient folklore and fairy tales to Transformers and *Twilight*. I loved learning about skinwalkers, French werewolves, and where in Romania to buy a bottle of Dracula Merlot. This book offers fascinating insight into the origins of the stories we continue to tell about our desire "to be someone or something other than what we are."

— BECKY HAGENSTON, author of
Scavengers: Stories (2016)



HISTORY

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SHAPESHIFTERS

JOHN B. KACHUBA

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2019



SHAPESHIFTERS

A History

JOHN B. KACHUBA

*To my parents,
John and Edith,
who taught me the transformative power of books.
You are loved.
You are missed.*

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The transformation of Dr Jekyll into Mr Hyde, 1880, colour lithograph.

Introduction

Entering the World of the Shapeshifter

As night falls, a desperate figure cowers in the forest, terrified and yet excited as he ponders what is about to unfold. The Moon rises full and round over the forest, and he is caught in its ghostly luminescence.

That is when the change happens.

Painfully, his bones stretch and grind as they shift into new positions. On all fours, his clothes shred, and his new, sleek, muscular body emerges. He watches in amazement as the nails on his hands and feet elongate into razor-sharp claws. Thick fur sprouts from his new paws. His face, his entire body are now covered in fur. Casting his large yellow eyes up to the Moon, saliva dripping from fanged teeth, he throws back his head and howls, a long, pitiful cry echoing through the forest.

The werewolf is born.

The werewolf, a person who transforms into a wolf at each full moon, is an example of a shapeshifter, a person who can change from a human form to that of an animal, either through his own agency or that of an outside source. Another shapeshifter stereotype is the vampire changing into a bat – think Count Dracula of the silver screen.

Shapeshifters are not new. Since ancient times, people from cultures all around the world have speculated on the possibilities of human beings transforming themselves into animals, or mythological creatures, and then returning to their human natures. Prehistoric

cave drawings discovered in Ariège, France, depict creatures that are half-animal and half-human, evidence of an ancient belief in shapeshifters. Primitive man knew that his life and the lives of the animals in his environment were inextricably bound together. He could hunt these animals for food, but they could just as easily hunt *him* for the same reason, especially when his animal adversaries often held the advantages of cunning, speed and strength.

But what if he could meet the animals on their own terms? What if he could develop the cunning of a fox, the speed of a cheetah or the strength of a lion? Surely, then, he would stand a much better chance of being the eater, rather than the eaten. It is entirely possible that this ancient yearning of man to become animal, at least temporarily, gave rise to the belief in shapeshifters.

In Native American and other indigenous cultures, it is common for hunters to don ritual costumes that mimic the appearance of certain animals, especially those animals hunted for sustenance, and to imitate their movements in dance rituals. But these dances are not simple mimicry; rather, the dancers believe they take on the animal's spirit, that in fact they *become* the animal and, by doing so, gain inside information relative to the animal's location and migration, thereby ensuring a successful hunt. The Plains Indians even went so far as to wear the horns and shaggy hides of bison to get close enough to the herd to make a kill. The manoeuvre was camouflage, but could there have been more meaning attached to wearing the disguise? Did the hunter become another bison?

In the late 1990s, the anthropologist Rane Willerslev spent a year living in a Yukaghir community in northeastern Siberia. Studying the relationship of Yukaghir hunters to the animals they hunted, he wrote from first-hand experience of how the hunters think 'humans and animals can turn into each other by temporarily taking on one another's bodies'. The hunters would dress in elk hides, walk like elk, take on the elk's consciousness, literally thinking, or so the Yukaghir believe, like an elk, to be accepted as an elk by the herd, thereby allowing them access for the kill. But there is a danger to this practice: the Yukaghir believe that an actual transformation could occur, making a hunter lose sight of his human nature, his

human soul. As Willerslev puts it, a hunter might lose his 'original species identity and undergo an invisible metamorphosis'.

The Yukaghirs tell of a deer hunter who wandered in the wilderness for hours, unsuccessful in the hunt. He came upon an unfamiliar camp where women fed him lichen, as if he were a deer. He began forgetting things but recalled his wife's name, and it was that recollection that snapped him back to his human nature.¹

There is something primal about shapeshifters, something that goes beyond simply wishing for the strength and cunning of animal prey. Humans are, of course, animals themselves but animals with a highly developed sense of morality and social mores that are set in place for the good order of the society. We react with indignation and anger when the rules we have set in place are violated by criminals, whether the violations be the petty theft of cigarettes from the corner store, or the wholesale slaughter of entire populations for racial, ethnic or religious reasons. We react that way because we know that we have a primal animal nature within us that must be controlled. But there is also the temptation to throw off the rules that keep our unsavoury behaviours in check and to embrace our animal natures, free of conscience, free of morality. Robert Louis Stevenson illustrated the struggle to keep that animal nature subdued in his memorable *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, in which Dr Jekyll develops a potion that transforms him into the sociopathic Mr Hyde and allows him to indulge his urges in a variety of vices, including murder. But poor Dr Jekyll is unable to control his metamorphosis into Mr Hyde, who becomes more and more dominant, and, in desperation, Jekyll kills himself.

Seen in this light, shapeshifting is a way of shaking off the constraints of society and the bonds of morality, granting licence for one to experience the wild, unfettered life of an animal. Stories abound from antiquity of people transforming into animals for exactly those reasons. Consider Zeus, who in ancient Greek mythology was known as the king, or father, of the gods, the latter a more fitting appellation since he sired many of the gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon. As lascivious as Zeus may have been, he often needed help to seduce – or rape – the women and men with whom he had sex. Disguising

his divinity through shapeshifting worked wonders for him; among his many shapeshifting conquests, he seduced Europa in the form of a white bull; his sister Hera in the guise of a cuckoo-bird; Leda as a swan; Danae in the form of a golden shower; Antiope in the guise of a satyr; Eurymedusa in the form of an ant; Kallisto in the disguise of the maiden Artemis; and Alkmene, to whom Zeus appeared in the form of her own husband. Another notable example of this form of shapeshifting trickery is found in Sir Thomas Malory's fifteenth-century *Le Morte d'Arthur*, in which Arthur, future king of England, is conceived. Through the sorcery of Merlin, Uther Pendragon is transformed for one night into the Duke of Tintagel to have intercourse with the object of his lust, the duchess Igraine, and thus sire the boy who will one day become King Arthur.

As evidenced in these stories, the shapeshifter archetype is not restricted to transformations of people into animals. Frequently, shapeshifting involves gender transformation. According to Jungian analysis, the *anima* is the female element in the male psyche, containing all the positive and negative traits of femininity; the *anima* is repressed in males, revealing itself in dreams. Conversely, the *animus* is the male element in the female unconscious, consisting of all positive and negative masculine traits. Ideally, the *anima* and *animus* are in balance, with each of us having masculine and feminine traits. Society, however, has arbitrarily decided which outward traits should be considered male and which female. A female with certain strong masculine traits learns to repress them, as does a male with strong feminine traits, although this may be changing in societies that recognize the broad range of human gender orientation.

In her blog *Shanna's Journal*, the fantasy author Shanna Swendsen writes, 'As a result, these repressed qualities have to come out in dreams, fantasies or projection – where the traits get mapped onto fantasy figures either in the form of crushes on real people or on fictional or mythological characters that represent the traits.'²

Gender-shifting shapeshifters are those mythological and fantasy creatures that embody the repressed gender traits coming into reality. They are not a new phenomenon, but have been around at least since the earliest recorded historical times. In Greek mythology, Tiresias



Section of a tile mosaic in the Museu Nacional do Azulejo, Lisbon, Portugal, depicting a shapeshifter.

is instantly changed into a woman when he finds two copulating snakes in the forest and pokes them with a stick. Tiresias lives as a woman for many years, marrying and having children, until she once again finds two snakes in copulation, prods them with the stick, and is transformed back into a man. Similar tales of gender-shifting can be found in Celtic and Norse legends, as well as in legends from other parts of the world.

Gender-shifting shapeshifters are popular in today's culture, appearing in movies, books, graphic novels and computer games. Their popularity might reflect society's burgeoning awareness and acceptance of the wide variations in human gender and sexual orientation. In some ways, they help to make these variations more commonplace, and by doing so, make them more acceptable to mainstream society.

But there is more to the attraction of the shapeshifter figure than wishing to 'run wild', or change genders, as important as these two explanations are. The shapeshifter represents the struggle to find one's identity, to find where one fits in society. Each of us fulfils many roles in our lives; we are members of a family; members of a particular society; citizens of a city, a state, a nation; followers of a certain religious belief or political philosophy. We act out our roles based on age, gender and ethnicity. We are sometimes defined by our economic and educational levels, or by the work we do. In a world that has become 'smaller' because of our access to the Internet and advances in media technology, resulting in instant worldwide news, we may find it necessary to shift some of our roles to fit new circumstances, new knowledge. We become confused as we find our various roles in conflict with the larger society, or even internally as we try to sort out which roles are applicable at certain times, or which may need to be modified. We become, in a sense, internal shapeshifters. Shapeshifters in popular culture mirror that confusion and the struggle to seek clarification of our identities.

On a simple level, shapeshifters represent the fantasy of being able to turn one's self into something more attractive or more powerful; this may account for the prevalence of shapeshifters in books and movies aimed towards an adolescent and teen audience. The *Harry Potter* books, *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* (the books and the film series) all feature shapeshifters that appeal greatly to a younger audience.

Gerry Turcotte, president and vice chancellor at St Mary's University in Alberta, Canada, writes, 'Where vampires may once have been emblematic of a despised other – the creature we feared becoming – in more contemporary stories the "monster" has become the "end goal," that which we want to be.'³ Who wouldn't want to

be sexy, rich and immortal like the vampires in the *Twilight* series of novels and movies?

While shapeshifters might be attractive in various ways, they are also considered untrustworthy. They are quite literally two-faced. As Zeus in his many guises demonstrates, a shapeshifter's words and actions might not represent its true nature.

Another shapeshifter motif is that the shapeshifter represents punishment or discipline. Fairy tales and folklore are full of examples of people who are transformed into animals or inanimate objects as punishment for some transgression they have committed. The transformation is obviously not voluntary but is accomplished through a curse or magic worked by a god or goddess, witch, shaman, sorcerer or anyone with magical or supernatural abilities. These types of shapeshifters are different from voluntary shapeshifters in that they have no control over their transformations and must rely on the agency of another person to change them back to their rightful forms.

A classic example of this type of shapeshifter is the popular story of the frog-prince who is restored to his regal humanity through the kiss of a maiden princess, although in the original Grimm brothers version of the story, the spell was broken when the princess threw the frog against a wall in disgust. Then there is the biblical story of Lot's wife, who is turned into a pillar of salt for looking back – despite God's warning not to do so – as she and Lot flee the destruction of Sodom. In Welsh mythology, Gilfaethwy, with the help of his brother Gwydion, rapes Goewn, a young virgin from the court of Math ap Mathonwy, king of Gwynedd. When a furious Math learns of their act, he uses his magic to transform Gilfaethwy into a hind and Gwydion into a stag; the brother animals mate and produce an offspring, who is delivered to Math. The next year, Math transforms Gilfaethwy into a boar and Gwydion into a sow. The two brothers mate and produce a son, who again is delivered to King Math. Then the king transforms the brothers into wolves, and a year later changes them back into men, ending their three-year enchantment as animals.

As some of these shapeshifter stories illustrate, the transformation of humans into animals, other humans or inanimate objects may be involuntary on the part of the person being transformed. Purists

might argue that the true shapeshifter has voluntary control over his transformations and can shift back and forth between his human nature and his transformed nature, each transformed state being temporary rather than permanent. But to truly embrace all possible forms of shapeshifting, emphasis should not be placed solely upon *how* the transformation occurs as much as on the fact that a transformation occurs at all. Expanding the shapeshifter definition in that manner allows for the inclusion of characters from mythology, folk stories, fairy tales and literature who are permanently transformed into something other than human. It would also include non-human characters – such as Transformers (toy vehicles that shift into robots) – whose transformations might or might not be permanent.

An interesting example of a non-human shapeshifter is H. P. Lovecraft's shoggoth. In his *At the Mountains of Madness*, the writer describes the creature:

It was a terrible, indescribable thing vaster than any subway train – a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles, faintly self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes forming and un-forming as pustules of greenish light all over the tunnel-filling front that bore down upon us, crushing the frantic penguins and slithering over the glistening floor that it and its kind had swept so evilly free of all litter.⁴

To further expand the shapeshifter definition, it is possible to include not only shapeshifters that undergo external transformations, such as werewolves, but shapeshifters that undergo an internal transformation; the transformation is hidden in that the shapeshifter appears physically unchanged. The indigenous hunters who believe they have taken on the spirit of their prey; the voodoo practitioners who believe their bodies have been taken over by spirits, the *lwa*; and people who believe they have been possessed by demons are all examples of internal shapeshifters.

Whether classified as internal or external, shapeshifters have not been relegated to some mythological closet, but are very much with us today. They can be found in popular movies, television shows,

books, graphic novels, video games and toys. Horror and fantasy fan conventions, such as Dragon Con, Yukicon and FanimeCon, draw thousands of attendees, many of whom dress up in the costumes of their favourite characters and, at least for a few hours, become those characters. This phenomenon has given rise to an entire international subculture called cosplay, a mash-up of the words 'costume' and 'play'. Gender-shifting in character costumes is a common theme among cosplay enthusiasts.

But as terrifying as encountering a blue-painted, fanged cosplayer at a convention might be, it is far more terrifying to encounter a *real* shapeshifter. And some people believe there *are* real shapeshifters: a 2011 news report from a South African town speaks of a man shifting into a pig and then into a bat, and a 2016 news report tells of a 2.4-metre (8-ft) werewolf in Hull, England. The Diné (Navajo) people live in fear of skinwalkers, medicine men or witches who they believe transform into animals to do harm to the people. Nearly twelve million people around the world believe many of the world's leaders are reptilian aliens who shapeshift into human likenesses.

The shapeshifter character is a powerful one that captures our imaginations and symbolizes so many of our inner longings and desires, as well as our unfulfilled aspirations. And who among us has not 'shapeshifted' in a masquerade, cosplay or a Halloween costume? Originating in the darkest caves of our primordial ancestors, the shapeshifter, true to its nature, has shaped itself to our modern times. Undiminished by time, the shapeshifter remains a potent force in our psyches and our culture and is worthy of further study.

This book will examine the history of the enduring shapeshifter archetype found in almost every culture around the world, an archetype that persists today and is believed by some to be more than myth.



Drawing by Henri Breuil of a cave painting found in Trois-frères, France, depicting a shaman transforming into a deer.

I

Gods and Goddesses: Shapeshifters in Antiquity

Firelight illuminates the cave where the shaman squats, working red ochre in his hands. He stands, his flickering shadow looming across the cave. The others watch as his hand moves across the cave wall, daubing on the red pigment. He scoops up more ochre and paints it on the wall, and then stands back to let the others see the bucking, running animals he has painted, the lion and deer, the horse and aurochs. They are held spellbound by the shapes that seem to move in the firelight. They appear lifelike, as though ready to burst from the wall. But one figure captivates them: a human figure that wears the head of a wolf.

There is nothing new about shapeshifters. They have been part of our cultural heritage since the dawn of time. Prehistoric man held a special bond with the animal world, an intimate bond that could mean life or death. That intimate connection is largely lost to modern society, except in some indigenous or 'primitive' cultures. Prehistoric man knew the real nature of the animals in his environment, recognizing the strength, speed and cunning they possessed and understanding that he needed to find the means to compete with those abilities in order to survive. So when those ancient cave dwellers watched their shaman draw a wolf-headed man, they knew that in some mystical way, he was invoking the powers of the wolf. By becoming wolflike, a hunter would be more successful and would also be better able to protect himself from animal adversaries.

One of the earliest representations of a figure wearing what could be a wolf mask is an engraving upon a rhinoceros bone discovered in 1928 at the Pin Hole Cave at Creswell Crags in Derbyshire, England. The artefact dates from the Late Upper Palaeolithic era and is believed to be about 12,000 years old.

Animal imitation was not limited to wolves, however, nor was it limited to animal masks. Archaeological evidence from Pin Hole Cave, as well as prehistoric sites in Spain and France, shows the symbolic importance of a wide range of animals, especially bears, lions, foxes, horses and deer. From cave paintings and other artefacts, archaeologists have deduced prehistoric rituals and dance ceremonies designed to invoke the spirits of animals. In such 'hunting magic' rituals, animal skins and masks might have been worn and participants might have adorned themselves with the teeth of tigers, bears or wolves. A Neolithic site in Turkey, Çatalhöyük, has cave art depicting men and women clad in leopard skins. Similar figures are found at Cueva de las Manos in Río Pinturas, Argentina, dating from about 7300 BC.

These cave paintings and artefacts clearly demonstrate the importance of hunting animals for the survival of the people, but what did they mean to the individual hunters participating in the rituals? Evidence of natural hallucinogens has been discovered at some prehistoric sites, giving rise to the theory that participants in hunting dance rituals might have been under their influence. If so, a hunter might have believed that he not only took on the spirit nature of the animal, but through hunting magic, transformed into the animal; he became a shapeshifter. It is important to note here that the perceived transformation from man into animal and back again was not within the power of mortal men, but of the shaman and his hunting magic that caused the perceived transformation. This notion that shapeshifting was a power given only to God, or the gods, or their mortal representatives, such as shamans, priests or saints, would be the way people thought about shapeshifters until the Middle Ages.

Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics display a number of fantastical creatures, gods who are half-animal and half-human (therianthropic), gods who are fully animals (theriomorphic) and gods who are fully

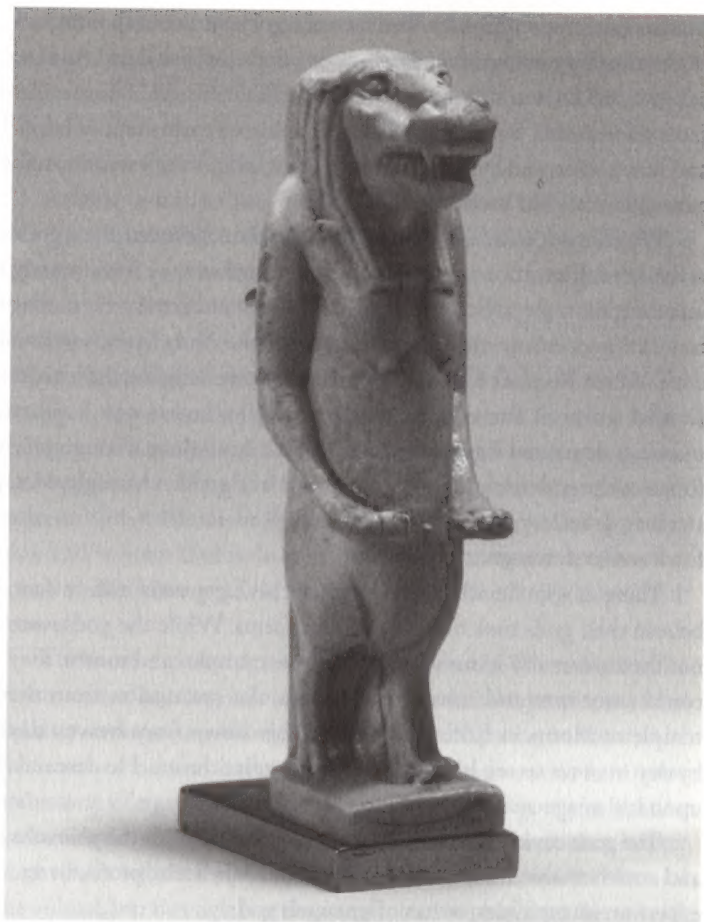
human (anthropomorphic). The first category particularly intrigues students of Egyptology; here is where one finds jackal-headed Anubis, cat-headed Bastet, ibis-headed Thoth, falcon-headed Horus and crocodile-headed Sebek, as well as the sphinxes with human heads and lion bodies, and hybrids such as Hathor, who is shown with cow's ears and horns but is otherwise human.

What is not clear is whether the Egyptians believed their gods actually took on those animal forms, or whether they were merely representational, symbolic of the gods' powers and attributes, similar to Jesus' association with a lion or lamb, or the Holy Spirit's with a dove. When Romans first encountered Egyptian religion, the satirist Juvenal wrote, in Satire xv of his *Satires*, 'Who knows not . . . what monsters demented Egypt worships?' Certainly, all three iconographic forms of the gods are widely demonstrated in Egyptian hieroglyphics, statuary, jewellery, and funerary and religious artefacts, but no one form seems dominant.

There is some evidence to suggest the Egyptians did, in fact, believe their gods took on these various forms. While the gods were not themselves the statues found in homes, temples and tombs, they could enter into and inhabit the statues. An inscription from the temple of Horus in Edfu reads, 'He comes down from heaven day by day in order to see his image upon his great throne. He descends upon his image and unites himself with his cult image.'

The gods could also inhabit humans, as they did with the pharaohs, and could inhabit animals as well. Honora Finkelstein, professor and expert on metaphysics, writes of one such god:

Apis was the sacred bull of Memphis. Supposedly, he was born of a virgin cow impregnated by the god Ptah. A physical bull was worshipped as the son of the god; at the age of 25, the bull would be sacrificed (perhaps in lieu of the sacrificial killing of the king), and a new baby bull was sought to take his place. The cult of Apis came to be so important that Ptolemy I introduced the god Serapis, a combination of Osiris and Apis, who was later honored along with Isis throughout the Roman Empire.¹



The Egyptian goddess Tawaret, with both animal and human features, Late Period, 664–332 BC.

While these Egyptian gods do not transform from one appearance to another and back again, as traditional shapeshifters, they are sometimes depicted in multiple forms. For example, Thoth could be depicted as an ibis or a white baboon, and the goddess Tawaret is often shown as a bipedal female hippopotamus with feline attributes, pendulous human breasts and the back of a Nile crocodile. Transforming or not, these gods and goddesses are powerful reminders of

the intimate connection between humans and animals and might be considered precursors to our modern conception of shapeshifters.

It should be noted here that some researchers define shapeshifters more narrowly, only as humans capable of transforming at will into animals and back again while maintaining their human consciousness. That concept is a particularly modern one; nevertheless, it has its roots in these ancient forms and so discussing these various forms of transformations is key to understanding the shapeshifter archetype.

Greek and Roman mythology is rife with stories of fantastical shapeshifting, but, here too, it is the gods who are the perpetrators of such transformations, working them upon the human race. Often the transformation is a permanent one, but there are also cases of shapeshifting that reverts back to human form and even a type of serial shapeshifting in which a human is transformed from one form to another, followed by other transformations into other forms.

In Book VIII of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the river god Achelous entertains the warrior Theseus and tells him of the transformational power of the gods:

O bravest hero, there are many people
Whose form has once been changed, who now remain
In their new state, and there are others, given
The power to change at will, Proteus, for instance,
Who lives in the sea that girds the world, he can
Be a young man, a lion, a raging boar,
Serpent or bull, a stone, a tree, a river,
A river's enemy, flame.

Achelous goes on to say that he, too, has been a shapeshifter:

I have often changed my own form, let me tell you,
Though I cannot always do it. I have been
A serpent, been the leader of a herd
With all my strength in my horns, but one of them,
As you can see for yourself, is gone.

The gods used shapeshifting to achieve various ends. Often the gods transformed themselves into animals or humans to seduce – or, more accurately, rape – female mortals or lesser divinities. Zeus (corresponding to the Roman god Jove) was the champion seducer in this manner, much to the anger and frustration of his wife (and sister), Hera (equivalent to the Roman goddess Juno). A partial list of his shapeshifting seductions includes the following: of Hera herself, in the form of a cuckoo-bird; of Asterie, as an eagle; of Aegina, as a flame; of Mnemosyne, in the guise of a shepherd; and even of an Arcadian nymph, in the form of the goddess Diana. Zeus' brother, Poseidon (equivalent to the Roman god Neptune), was a runner-up for the crown of shapeshifting seducer, with several conquests including in the forms of a bull, river, ram, stallion, bird and dolphin.

In addition to satisfying their lust, the gods used shapeshifting to avenge wrongs done to them, no matter how petty. In cases in which one god was wronged by another, the injured party would often seek revenge on a hapless human follower of the other god, since one



Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse, sculpture depicting Leda seduced by Zeus in the form of a swan, c. 1870.

god could not undo the workings of another god. Sometimes the gods used their transformational powers on humans unmercifully, as when the goddess Diana turned the hunter Acteon into a stag simply because he stumbled upon her naked, bathing in a woodland pool. His own hunting dogs ran him into the ground in his stag form and tore him apart.

Ovid writes of how the depraved Lycaon murdered a messenger, cut up his body, boiled the parts and served them to Jove, who was disguised as a mere mortal. For this heinous act, Jove turned Lycaon into a wolf:

Foam dripped from his mouth; bloodthirsty still, he turned
 Against the sheep, delighting still in slaughter,
 And his arms were legs, and his robes were shaggy hair,
 Yet, he is still Lycaon, the same grayness,
 The same fierce face, the same red eyes, a picture
 Of bestial savagery.

Lycaon becomes one of the earliest recorded werewolves, if not the first; the condition of being a werewolf, lycanthropy, derives its name from him.

But the gods weren't always vindictive, and sometimes transformed people in sympathy for their plights or to help them escape bad situations, as when the river god Peneus turns Daphne into a laurel tree to prevent her imminent rape by Apollo.

In these ancient tales, shapeshifting was a power reserved for the gods and their special representatives among the people. Wielding this power allowed the gods to play out a cosmic chess game of sorts, with poor humanity serving as pawns. As long as the gods jealously guarded the power to shapeshift, mortals had no chance of challenging them.

The shapeshifting motif of the ancient world was not restricted to polytheistic Egyptian, Greek and Roman societies, but crossed cultural boundaries, even to the monotheistic Hebrews. In the Old Testament, in Genesis 19:24–26, God destroys the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but allows the righteous Lot and his wife to escape, providing they do not look back as they flee. Despite

that injunction, Lot's wife's curiosity gets the best of her; she looks back and is instantly transformed into a pillar of salt. In the Book of Exodus 3:1-15, God speaks to Moses through a burning bush. Later, in Exodus 4:1-5, Moses asks God how to get the Israelites to follow him as their leader. God tells Moses to cast the staff that he carries onto the ground, where it instantly transforms into a serpent. Moses flees in fear, but God encourages him to come back and take the serpent by the tail, whereupon it becomes a staff again, thereby demonstrating that God's power could be worked through Moses as leader of the Israelites. In Numbers 22:28-31, Balaam's donkey speaks to him, chastising the man for beating him. In Daniel 4:33, Nebuchadnezzar is stripped of his kingship and his kingdom for refusing to recognize God, but worse, is transformed into a beast, possibly a werewolf:

The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar; and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like bird claws.

Angels often took on the form of humans; in the New Testament Book of Hebrews 13:2, one is warned to 'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.'

There are passages in the New Testament that seem to illustrate God's power as a shapeshifter. In Luke 3:22, one reads, 'And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him.' In Luke 24, the resurrected Jesus joins two of his disciples as they walk to Emmaus, but they do not recognize him; the scripture reads, 'their eyes were holden that they should not recognize him.' Why wouldn't these men, who had spent so much time with Jesus, have been able to recognize him? Could he have deliberately altered his form, his appearance, to test their faith?

Another ancient text points to the remarkable possibility of Jesus as a shapeshifter. In 2012, Roelof van den Broek, professor of the history of Christianity at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, translated and interpreted a Coptic text nearly 1,300 years old held



Hendrik Goltzius, 'Lycaon Transformed into a Wolf', engraving from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1589 edn).

in the Morgan Library and Museum in New York City. According to Van den Broek, the apocryphal stories in the text show the Roman procurator, Pilate, having dinner with Jesus the night before he is executed and even offering to sacrifice his own son in place of Jesus. Such apocryphal stories have been around for a long time, as evidenced by this text, and while they have not been accepted in the canon that comprises the Bible, they were believed true by the people for whom they were originally written.

But one of the most intriguing passages from the ancient text is one that implies Jesus to be a shapeshifter. The text reads,

Then the Jews said to Judas: How shall we arrest him [Jesus], for he does not have a single shape but his appearance changes. Sometimes he is ruddy, sometimes he is white, sometimes he is red, sometimes he is wheat colored, sometimes he is pallid like ascetics, sometimes he is a youth, sometimes an old man.'

The Jews who had come to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane needed a way to identify Jesus because of his ability to

change appearance, according to Van den Broek. Judas, apparently always able to recognize him, tells the Jews he will identify Jesus for them as the man he kisses. This understanding of Judas' kiss can be found in the writings of Origen, the second-century theologian. In *Contra Celsum*, he writes, 'to those who saw him [Jesus] he did not appear alike to all.'

As with other gods of antiquity, Jesus was perceived, at least by some, as a divine shapeshifter. Through that lens, his life may be seen as a series of transformations, from incorporeal god to man who was also god incarnate, to resurrected spirit, and to incorporeal god once again.

The notion of gods, or their divine representatives, as shapeshifters can be found in ancient cultures far removed from Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures. In the Norse pantheon, Odin is the supreme god, ruling over all the others from his home in Asgard. Odin roamed the world, often in the guise of a one-eyed old man, and was the bringer of wisdom and knowledge to heroes. Loki, the Nordic trickster god, was also a shapeshifter. In the tale *The Fortification of Asgard*, Loki transforms into a mare that is impregnated by the stallion Svadilfari and births Sleipnir, Odin's shamanic horse.

Shapeshifting gods and divine entities are widespread in Asian cultures as well, especially those of China, India, Japan and Korea. Two common Japanese shapeshifters are the raccoon-like dog *tanuki* and the fox *kitsune*; as a group, Japanese shapeshifters are called *benge*. Shapeshifting fox lore, 'fox magic', came to Japan by way of China and Korea, although the genesis of the fox shapeshifter lies in India. In Japan, the fox became associated with the rice goddess, Inari, possibly because foxes appeared in the spring at the same time as the rice paddies began to flourish. The fox became known as the messenger of Inari. Imbued with supernatural powers to do both good and evil, the fox could cast illusions, appear in dreams, and hear and see all the secrets of humankind. It had the ability to transform into a variety of forms, one of the most prevalent being that of a bewitching woman who seduces and tricks unworthy men or rewards and protects deserving people. In human form, the female fox shapeshifter can breed with a man. It takes *kitsune* a century, however, before their



The Norse god Loki, from an 18th-century Icelandic manuscript.

power grows to the point where they can transform themselves or possess humans. Their power increases as they age, and when they are 1,000 years old, they turn gold, silver or white in colour, grow nine tails and develop the power of infinite vision.

A *kitsune* story titled 'The Fox in the Brothel' tells of a poor but honest woodcutter who finds a vixen with its paws caught in a trap. Moved to pity, but unwilling to steal the catch of a trapper, he goes home to get the only silver coin he owns, returns to the trap, where he sets the fox free, and leaves the coin in its place for the trapper.

In gratitude, the fox appears to him the next night as a beautiful maiden clothed in an elegant silken robe and orders him to sell her to a brothel in the city. His pure heart rebels at such a notion, but she insists she will hold him blameless and tells him that she will escape from the brothel in her fox form. The woodcutter relents and takes her to the city where the brothel owner pays him handsomely in gold for the comely maiden.

At the brothel, the beautiful lady catches the eye of a prince, who brings her to a party at the palace. There she is the centre of attention of all the men. The lights suddenly go out and the fox-woman cries out that she has been groped by someone in the crowd. She declares that she cannot bear to live with her shame. She runs to her room, strips off her clothes and throws them out the window into the river. Transforming into her fox shape, she escapes through the window. The prince discovers her clothes in the river and assumes she has drowned.

The next night, the maiden, dressed in an even more elegant robe, again appears to the poor woodcutter and offers to become his wife. He declines, saying that he is not worthy of her. She tells him to go back to the brothel owner, tell him of her apparent suicide and demand payment for her loss. He does so and is again paid in gold, making him a wealthy man.

The next night, as the now-wealthy woodcutter sits in his doorway, the fox-woman appears, this time naked. She tries to tempt him with her beauty and offers to be his concubine, but the woodcutter covers his eyes and again declines her improper offer. At that, the fox-woman cries out in joy saying, 'Blessing and benison upon thee, O incorruptible one! As a fox, I have dwelt upon the earth for five hundred years, and never before have I found among humankind one whose merit had the power to set me free.' Because of the woodcutter's honesty and purity, the fox-woman is forever freed of her animal nature and vanishes before his eyes.

This tale is typical of *kitsune* stories in that it illustrates foremost the shapeshifting abilities of the *kitsune*, but also the shapeshifter's seductive nature and its ability to bring good luck to those who interact with it wisely. What is slightly different about it from other shapeshifter stories is the *kitsune's* insinuation that she had been

trapped in the form of a shapeshifter and needed to be freed by some power other than her own, in this case that of a human being's honesty and purity. Although the fox *kitsune* in this story maintains its close association with the goddess Inari, and so may be considered divine, the tale may also be read as an early example of the 'shapeshifter as curse' theme that becomes more prevalent in later ages.

One of the nastiest shapeshifters connected to a divinity comes from Hindu mythology and, as that religion influenced Buddhism, the creatures are also found in that tradition. The *rakshasa* were created from Brahma's breath while he was asleep; some versions say they were created from his foot. At the moment of their creation, they were so fuelled by their hunger and bloodlust, they began to devour Brahma, who called out to Vishnu 'Rakshama!', which is Sanskrit for 'Protect me!' Vishnu saved Brahma and banished the *rakshasa* to Earth, where they became a scourge to mankind.

In their natural state, if that can be said of shapeshifters, the demonic *rakshasa* are huge and incredibly strong, big-bellied cannibals thriving on human flesh, with an insatiable appetite for the vulnerable, children and women. They look like ugly, deformed humans with red eyes, sharp claw-like fingernails, abnormally long tongues and fangs. Imbued with magic powers, they can fly and hunt at night when their powers increase, like werewolves and vampires, but unlike vampires they take pleasure in attacking temples and interrupting religious rites, especially weddings. With their magical abilities, they can make themselves invisible and reanimate the dead.

As shapeshifters, *rakshasa* are able to transform into almost anything or anyone. Bird forms, such as vultures and owls, are a favourite, but they might also change into beautiful women, like the Japanese *kitsune*, to seduce and devour careless men. They might also appear as a lover or husband to women.

The *rakshasa* appear in the holy texts of Hinduism and Buddhism and, for the most part, are depicted as evil demons with no redeeming qualities and an intense hatred for the human race. There are some exceptions to this depiction, however. In the *Ramayana*, Vibhishana is a *rakshasa* who lives a righteous and pious life. His evil *rakshasa* brother, Ravana, is king of Lanka. When Rama leads a military

campaign of his monkey-soldiers against Ravana, who has kidnapped Rama's wife, Sita, Ravana sends invisible *rakshasa* into Rama's camp. Using his magic, Vibhishhana renders the invaders visible, allowing Rama's army to attack and slaughter them. Ravana is killed. As a reward, Rama makes Vibhishhana the king of Lanka.

In the particularly grisly Bengali story titled 'Dalim Kumar', found in *Thakurmar Jbuli*, an anthology of oral tales collected by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar in 1907, an evil *rakshasa* lives in a palm tree in the garden of the royal palace. She alone knows that the good queen's life is protected inside dice. She transforms into a beggar woman and, seeing the young prince playing with dice, begs them from him. The boy does not know the secret of the dice and gives them to the *rakshasa*-woman, who immediately gobbles up the queen and takes on her appearance. There are more transformations in this complicated story, including shapeshifting into an asp, a mouse and earthworms. Although it takes many years, everything works out in the end, when the *rakshasa* is finally discovered and killed and the queen restored to life.³

According to Hindu tradition, the god Vishnu incarnates on Earth from time to time in various forms to restore the cosmic order. There are ten distinct avatars of Vishnu. In order of their appearance on Earth, they are Matsya, the fish, who saves Manu (the first man) from the flood that destroys the Earth (Noah-like, Matsya takes one of every species of plant and animal in a boat to a new world to begin again); Kurma, the tortoise, who bears the weight of the Earth, as it sinks beneath the waters; Varaha, the boar, who carries the Earth up from beneath the waters in his tusks; the half-man, half-lion Narasimha; the boy, Vamana; Parashurama, the warrior with an axe; Rama, thought of as the ideal heroic man; Krishna, depicted as a pleasant young man with blue complexion; Gautama Buddha; and Kalki, the 'Destroyer of Filth', who will usher in the end times, arriving on a white horse and bearing a blazing sword.

Buddhist and Hindu traditions in India and Southeast Asia tell of nagas, divine creatures that combine human and snake qualities, sometimes shapeshifting from one form to the other. Often thought of as water spirits, nagas are susceptible to mankind's disrespectful



A statue in Yogyakarta of a *rakshasa* demon.

actions in relation to the environment and might lash out at humans who destroy it, although they are generally malevolent to humans only when they have been harmed.

In some parts of southern India, nagas are venerated as bringers of fertility and prosperity. There are Hindu rituals in which women make offerings to representations of the snake goddesses – snake images carved on stones. Another form depicts one of the snake goddesses as an anthill, or as an anthill inhabited by a snake. Because of

the deep reverence held for nagas in this region, people are careful not to harm snakes. To do so would inflict the perpetrator with *nāga dōsam*, a condition that causes delay in marriage and infertility and can only be reversed through extensive religious devotions.

In many Buddhist countries of Asia, notably Thailand, nagas are regarded as great and wise serpents and are sometimes associated with dragons. It is not uncommon to find representations of nagas incorporated as architectural details in Thai Buddhist temples.

In the Buddhist tradition, the naga takes on the appearance of a large cobra, sometimes a cobra with several heads. Nagas are capable of transforming themselves into humans through magic. Buddhist paintings and sculpture will sometimes portray them as cobras acting as cosmic umbrellas as they rear up over a seated Buddha, protecting him from rain and sun. One Buddhist story tells of a naga in human form attempting to become a monk. The Buddha stops the naga but reassures it that monkhood will be possible once it is reincarnated as fully human.

These international tales of shapeshifting gods and goddesses might seem like relics of antiquity, with no resonance with contemporary times, but such an opinion belies the staying power of these stories. Moreover, it ignores the hold such stories have on the human psyche. For example, ancient Hawaiian stories speak of the fiery and volatile goddess Pele's power of transformation, in addition to her awesome power of transforming the land through volcanic activity. Pele is known to be passionate, capricious and promiscuous, taking several lovers by transforming into a desirable young woman. One of those lovers is a demigod named Kamapua'a, who is himself a shapeshifter with the ability to appear as a pig, a plant or a fish. According to tradition, Pele lives in the caldera high atop Kilauea on the island of Hawaii. And she still walks among the island people. David Malo, a Hawaiian historian born in 1795, wrote of Pele's transformations into human form:

The kahu [guardians] of the Pele deities also were in the habit of dressing their hair in such a way as to make it stand out at great length, then, having inflamed and reddened their

eyes, they went about begging for any articles they took a fancy to, making the threat, 'If you don't grant this request, Pele will devour you.' Many people were imposed upon in this manner, fearing Pele might actually consume them.⁴

Today stories abound in the Hawaiian Islands of motorists who, driving through Kilauea National Park, stop to pick up an old lady, dressed all in white and accompanied by a little dog. They drive off with their passenger but when they look in the rear-view mirror, they find the back seat empty. The islanders know the old lady hitchhiker is Pele.

From Zeus to Vibhishhana to Pele, there have been shapeshifter gods and goddesses from cultures all around the world. In ancient times, before science and technology could explain so many mysteries of the universe, the gods were supreme and all-powerful, and it was often their ability to shapeshift that gave them such tremendous power. But as civilization developed and people became more curious and knowledgeable, they challenged the old gods. With more than just a little hubris, man began to think he could harness at least some of the powers that were formerly possessed only by gods. Technology, science and even alchemy could make that happen. Shapeshifting, the ability to transform one's self into something 'other', was one of the most desired of the divine powers, and mankind sought to wrest that power from the gods.

When Men Become Gods: Mortal Shapeshifters

In antiquity it was the gods and goddesses who held the power of physical transformation. But as mankind became more enlightened, shamans, wizards and other 'fay folk' challenged the belief in these divinities and appropriated some of their supposed powers, including that of shapeshifting.

'The aliens are already here, they've been hiding in this country for hundreds of years. They're shape-shifters, they look like regular people, but they're aliens.' That comic line was uttered in a March 2017 television episode of *Saturday Night Live*, in which President Donald Trump, played by Alec Baldwin, is faced with an alien invasion. Although the aliens he mentions are a thinly disguised reference to illegal immigrants in America, calling them 'shape-shifters' has a peculiar resonance that may have eluded Baldwin and the show's producers. Perhaps unknown to them is the fact that millions of people around the world believe aliens – reptilian aliens to be exact – walk among us, transformed as humans. Indeed, believers assert aliens have been among us for thousands of years, quietly biding their time to take over our planet.

In some ways, this belief – it can hardly be called theory, weak as it is in facts – is a throwback to the belief in the powers of the old gods, especially the power to transform themselves, or others, into people, animals or objects of their choosing. This modern belief substitutes unknown aliens for the old gods, once again dominating humanity with their awesome, godlike powers.

But there is an interesting corollary here. As humanity emerged from dark prehistoric caves, gradually developing science, technology and communication, the clay feet of the old gods became apparent. Zeus' thunderbolts eventually became understood as the occurrence of a natural electrical discharge of very short duration and high voltage between a cloud and the ground or within a cloud, accompanied by a bright flash and typically also thunder: lightning. Pele's violent and fiery temper was recognized as a rupture in the crust of the Earth that allows hot lava, volcanic ash and gases to escape from a magma chamber below the surface: a volcanic eruption. Many of the mysterious, frightening and seemingly miraculous events previously attributed to the gods could now be explained by science, causing widespread unemployment in the realms of the divine. But not entirely.

Mankind still could not fathom the depths of life or death, or answer the basic questions of why there was suffering in the world, or what purpose our very existence served, if any. The answers to such profound questions were still believed to be in the old gods' knowing, so man invented faith. Faith that the old gods still had some powers took the burden of worrying about those questions from mankind. The gods would handle everything as long as man maintained faith in them.

Still, advances in science and technology, and an exponentially increasing body of knowledge available to everyone – at first through the printing press and now through computer technology – gave humanity powers it never dreamed it could possess. In so many ways, humanity could challenge the gods.

We have seen how the power of transformation was formerly held by the old gods and their representatives, locked away from mankind. Humans, in fact, often became the victims of punitive divine transformations. As civilization progressed, and science and technology imbued mankind with some of the powers formerly held by the gods, a new class of beings capable of shapeshifting came into existence. Known by various names – shamans, wizards, witches, sorcerers – these people were not divine beings but were believed by the common folk to have supernatural natures, elevating them above all

others but not granting them divinity. Their powers were limited, although shapeshifting was a commonly held one.

A striking example of such shapeshifters were the Norse berserkers, warriors who fought in such a nearly uncontrollable, trance-like fury, it seemed they were insane. In battle, they foamed at the mouth, howled and growled like wild animals, and gnawed on the iron rims of their shields. Our modern word 'berserk' is derived from them. Norse legends have their share of shapeshifters, most notably Odin and Loki, and the berserkers believed they could, like their gods, transform into wild animals, especially bears, wolves and boars.

In his saga *Ynglinga*, the Icelandic historian and poet Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) had this to say of the berserkers:

His [Odin's] men rushed forwards without armour, were as mad as dogs or wolves, bit their shields, and were strong as bears or wild oxen, and killed people at a blow, but neither fire nor iron told upon them. This was called *Berserker-gang*.

The berserkers wore wolf- or bearskins in battle and sometimes masks and were laid out on bearskins when they died. The idea of wearing an animal's pelt and thereby taking on its strength, cunning and ferocity had its genesis in the hunter-magic rituals of the Neolithic era. The rage that berserkers experienced in battle was called *berserker-gang*, which literally means 'going berserk'. Howard D. Fabing suggests the berserkers' wild behaviour was caused by the ingestion of hallucinogenic mushrooms, specifically *Amanita muscaria*. These fungi contain bufotenine, which is associated with causation of schizophrenia. Fabing describes the berserker condition when under the influence of the hallucinogen:

This fury, which was called *berserker-gang*, occurred not only in the heat of battle, but also during laborious work. Men who were thus seized performed things which otherwise seemed impossible for human power. This condition is said to have begun with shivering, chattering of the teeth, and chill in the body, and then the face swelled and changed

its colour. With this was connected a great hot-headedness, which at last gave over into a great rage, under which they howled as wild animals, bit the edge of their shields, and cut down everything they met without discriminating between friend or foe. When this condition ceased, a great dulling of the mind and feebleness followed, which could last for one or several days.¹

Allied warriors were warned to keep their distance from berserkers in battle, since the crazed warriors would strike out at anyone indiscriminately while they were in their frenzied state, killing friend and foe alike.

In addition to the berserkers, in Viking times there were the wolf warriors – *ulfhednar* – and boar warriors, the *svinfylking*. Like the berserkers, these warriors wore animal masks and the pelts of their namesake animals and fought with the same trance-induced ferocity. All three warrior classes were used as shock troops by Norse leaders to devastating effect. However, they could also be highly unpredictable, and by the twelfth century berserker war-bands had been outlawed throughout Scandinavia and ceased to exist.

An interesting note is that such transforming warriors still exist today. During the recent civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Mende fighters spoke about combat as 'heating up' the heart. When this happens, the warrior is transformed to the point where he is thought literally to become someone else. He shapeshifts from a peaceful Mende man to a ferocious fighter who, in that state, is capable of both great courage and great cruelty. Here is a description of a transformed Mende fighter by journalist Sebastian Junger:

I was in both Liberia and Sierra Leone during those wars, and the combatants who had a 'hot heart' were unmistakable. They wore amulets and magical charms and acted as if they were possessed, deliberately running into gunfire and dancing while firing their weapons to prove how brave they were. Other people's lives didn't seem to matter to them because their own lives didn't seem to matter to them. They were true

nihilists and that made them the most terrifying human beings I've ever encountered.²

For several centuries in medieval Europe, hundreds of women, and some men, were accused of witchcraft and hauled before the Inquisition or civil authorities. With the ascendancy of Christianity in Europe, clerics brooked no challenges to their authority; witchcraft and traditional folk beliefs seemed to be such challenges. The Church was ruthless in its attempts to root out these perceived evils, relying on imprisonment and torture to achieve its goals. Testimony against the accused frequently mentioned the witches' ability to shapeshift, to transform into animals – cats, owls, ravens and rabbits were favourites – or into inanimate objects, and even into other people. It was clear to the clerics that the witches were not powerful goddesses but were, to the contrary, humans who had sold their souls to Satan in return for supernatural powers such as shapeshifting.

Throughout that time, and even up to the eighteenth century, similar purges of purported werewolves and vampires also relied on accounts of people who testified that they had witnessed the accused individuals shapeshifting into their supernatural forms. In these cases, too, the authorities did not believe divine powers to be at work, but assumed shapeshifting to be in the realm of the diabolical.

The power to shapeshift is still accorded to witches and shamans in various cultures. In Central America, the *nagual* (which roughly translates to 'transforming witch') is a human being who can transform either physically or spiritually into an animal, most commonly a jaguar or puma, although *naguales* can also become donkeys, bats, birds, dogs or coyotes. The *nagual* tradition is ancient, dating back to pre-Columbian shamanistic practices. In modern rural Mexico, the indigenous peoples associate the *nagual* with a *brujo*, a witch. They believe the *nagual* transforms into an animal at night to drink blood from humans and animals, to spread disease and generally to wreak havoc among the people.

Another example of a shapeshifting shaman is the skinwalker, whose stories have long been a part of Diné (Navajo) culture. A skinwalker is a shaman who has attained the highest degree of spirituality,

but whose heart is set on evil rather than goodness. If one desires to become a skinwalker and gain the ability to shapeshift, as well as other supernatural powers, one must kill a close family member. Skinwalkers commonly transform into coyotes, foxes, wolves, owls or crows, although they have the power to change into anything. A strong belief in skinwalkers persists among the Diné, and most of the people are reluctant to talk about them, lest such talk draws the skinwalkers' ire.

Throughout the world, there are many other stories of humans shapeshifting into some animal or other inhuman entity without the machinations of the gods. One interesting, and uncommon type, of shapeshifter is the *moura encantada* of Portugal. The term refers to an 'enchanted Moorish woman' and comes from the time of the Reconquista, when Spain and Portugal forced the Moors out of their countries after several centuries of occupation. The stories all involve wealthy Moorish men who were forced to flee Portugal, leaving their riches behind. To safeguard those riches for what they hoped would be an eventual return to Portugal, the men would 'enchant' – one might say 'curse' – one of their favourite daughters to remain behind as a guardian of his treasure. Unfortunately for these beautiful young maidens, the enchantment transformed them, usually into giant snakes with a woman's head and hair. In some legends and texts, they are described as 'half woman, half snake'.

In some stories, the maidens themselves are the 'treasures', with their fathers enchanting them to specific hiding places such as fountains, wells, caves and bridges to keep them protected until they can return for them. In any case, the *mouras* are always shapeshifters as a result of their initial enchantment.

Dr Isabel Cardigos, from the University of the Algarve in Portugal, has studied legends of the *mouras* extensively and recounts a typical *mouras* story:

Near the end of the Arab occupation of the Algarve in southern Portugal, the Christians conquered the fortified village of Loulé, and the ex-governor managed to flee with his three daughters. When he realized that he could not take them safely away with him, he enchanted them near a well, hoping

later to come back for them. He uttered a spell and they remained enchanted inside the well.

Years later some Christian prisoners arrived in Tangier. The *mouras*' father recognized one of them and he trusted him with three baked bread loaves, each with the name of one of the three girls, explaining what he should do. The Christian was sent back home in a magic basin, carrying with him the three loaves. When he arrived, he hid them in a chest while he waited for St John's Eve, the day when the disenchantment could take place.

In the meantime, his wife found the loaves and she cut one of them to see if there was any treasure inside. The loaf bled, and she rushed to put it back where it was. When the time came, the man went and threw the loaves inside the well, one at a time, while he called for the name written on each particular loaf. He then saw a cloud coming out of the well and flying south. When it came to the turn of the *moura* whose loaf his wife had cut, he heard a moan. She could not get free and go because her leg had been cut and would have to remain enchanted in the well.³

The *moura*'s enchantment could be broken only by a man who understood her true value, who understood the nature of love. All he had to do was kiss a *moura serpent*, a snake-woman, to disenchant her, being rewarded at the minimum with her treasure, but sometimes with the treasure *and* the *moura* herself, now permanently restored to a beautiful, young woman.

In many stories, the *moura* would appear temporarily as a woman during a full moon or at the summer solstice, combing her hair with a golden comb, or spinning thread with a golden needle. She would ask a passing man what he thought she had of value. The wrong answer – the golden comb or needle – would only double her enchantment. Should the man answer correctly, that she was the most valuable, he would break her spell and win her along with her riches.

According to legend, *mouras-fiandeiras* (spinner *mouras*) are responsible for the construction of some ancient sites in Portugal,



These ancient stone monoliths in southern Portugal are said to be the home of *mouras encantadas*.

such as the dolmens and megaliths outside the city of Eborá, and Palaeolithic hillforts such as Citânia de Santis. There is a large, wheel-like stone called the Pedra Formosa at Citânia de Briteiros that was said to have been carried to the site on the head of a *mouras-fiandeiras* while she was spinning thread with a spindle. Some legends assert that these *mouras* were capable of building such structures overnight. Some people believe the *mouras-fiandeiras* still live in these remote, ancient places.

Another type of *moura* is the *pedra-moura* (stone *moura*), which lives in stones. This belief may have originated with pre-Roman peoples on the Iberian Peninsula who believed the souls of the dead lived in certain rocks. Even today in Portuguese lore, there are tales of certain rocks that people might be able to enter and exit.

While stories of *mouras encantadas* span centuries and are thought of as folklore, or dusty stories from the past, in some areas of Portugal, especially rural areas, people believe the *mouras* exist. In her paper, Cardigos relates the story of a construction worker operating a bulldozer on a roadwork project in rural Arouca, Portugal. He accidentally ran over a large snake, killing it. A month later, the bulldozer driver died, leading the rural people to the conclusion that the snake he

had killed was no ordinary snake but was, in fact, a *moura* who then revenged herself upon him. The story became more detailed as it was retold. Now it is asserted that the snake had hair on its head, and a year after the driver died, the story had evolved to the point where the snake apparently begged to be spared, but to no avail, thus its revenge upon the driver.⁴

Many reports of modern-day shapeshifters come from the African continent, especially in rural areas and among indigenous cultures. Once again, the shapeshifters are not gods, but are humans with supposed supernatural abilities. In South Africa in 1987, a man named Naletzane Netshiavha woke to the sound of something scratching at his front door. Grabbing an axe, he flung open the door to find a large bat hanging from the rafters of his roof. Terrified, he struck at the bat with the axe, knocking it to the ground, and then fled in a panic. Returning a few minutes later with reinforcements, he saw the tattered bat dragging itself towards a fence in the yard. While his posse stood at a distance, Netshiavha struck the beast with the axe again and again until it lay still.

The witnesses gathered around and, as court testimony shows, each of them saw different things. Some saw the creature was a small donkey; others saw a winged beast. But all agreed that, as the creature lay dying, it transformed, at first taking on the body of a small child with an adult's head, before shapeshifting into a complete adult man. The body turned out to be that of Jim Nephalama, an elderly man widely recognized as a wizard who often boasted of his magical powers, one of them, presumably, the power to shapeshift. The trial judge sentenced Netshiavha to ten years' imprisonment for culpable homicide, saying Netshiavha should have been able to discern between a man and a bat.

But that was precisely the problem: Netshiavha was incapable of such discernment because his cultural beliefs informed him that magic was real, shapeshifters were real, and their power to change their form into anything they wanted, at any time, defied distinctions of logic and rationality.

In 2014, reports from Steytleville, South Africa, told of a shapeshifter roaming the town. It never interacted with or harmed any of

the people and appeared as a man wearing a suit who changed into a pig, and then a bat. The sightings began a month before Easter, when the shapeshifter interrupted two funerals for reasons known only to itself. Local police were unable to apprehend the creature, who was most often spotted at night.

That same year, residents of a small town in Nigeria saw three black birds in the sky just before daybreak. As the sky grew lighter, one of the birds transformed into a ninety-year-old woman and alighted to the ground. She readily admitted to the astonished townspeople that she was a witch returning to her village from her coven in Lagos with her witch friends, when she lost her way in the dark. She said the sunlight weakened her magical powers and turned her back to her human form. She seemed confused and said some things about murdering her husband, but the police found no evidence of any crime and released her, presumably with a map.

In April 2017 a report of an African shapeshifter, as told by Sika Bersah of the National Service Personnel at the Agriculture Department, Denu-Tokor, Ketu South Municipality, Volta Region, Ghana, relates another bizarre shapeshifter story:

THE DANGEROUS CREATURE CAPTURED BY A FARMER AT AFIKE, VOLTA REGION. It has been a week now when residents and farmers within Ketu South Municipality and its neighbours have been experiencing terrifying moments both day and night.

There was this creature that camouflage into either pig, guinea pig, or any other wild animal and enter kraal, pen or other dwellings of animals and devour the ordinary pig, sheep, cow, chicken and other animal it chance on by eating the intestines, lever [*sic*], heart and other delicate part, leaving the remains and disappear thereof. This creature sometimes after turning into a pig do chase people at night and when they run into their rooms, it do try to break their doors to chance on them for its prey but when alarm is been raised by those victims, it disappears abruptly. These terrifying occurrence have been disturbing the inhabitants of the

Municipality but no one could help halt the menace until this afternoon (Friday 21st April, 2017) when a hunter who was on his hunting expedition unexpectedly saw the creature in a human-like form and suddenly turned into a wild animal, on the process of shooting it, it quickly developed wings and flew to Afife, a nearby community where it met an old man in his farm trying to devour him for its prey but unfortunately on its part fail when the man chanted severally, making reference to the forefathers protective magic.

The creature camouflage into human being, a male of course and became maimed and unmovable in the farm until the man went home (Afife). The man narrated the ordeal to the town folks and selected some youth provided them with some magical herbs to serve as protection and sent them to the farm and bring the human like creature home. Upon their arrival, the creature turned into a half-human, half-duck, short creature and later on, a normal human being. No camera could capture it/him until police officers arrived and were able to capture it with their camera when it became human being finally but couldn't speak. The people of Ketu South Municipality and its neighbourhood can now have their peace at night and day.⁵

Shapeshifting is a common ability among African shamans, especially among the Bushmen healers of the Kalahari. In their book *Shamans of the World*, anthropologists Nancy Connor and Bradford Keeney transcribe an interview with Ngwaga Osele, a Bushman healer, who describes how he derives his healing powers from shapeshifting into a lion. Osele says,

When I start to become a lion, I feel pain and start to cry. I have to leave the dance [a ritual healing dance] and go into the bush where I make the change. The lion's spirit changes my mind and body. Fur grows out of my skin and claws grow from my hands. This is when I am most powerful.⁶

His account is unusual for being so specific but also for talking about what it *feels* like to make the transformation from human to animal forms. Bo, another Bushman doctor, elaborates on the process:

Let me tell you how I became a lion. It was a good dance several years ago and I was feeling the arrows [not actual arrows, but the spiritual power of the 'Big God'] getting very hot. When my arrows started to move up my body, I felt the pull of the fire. I went toward it and danced while staring at it. When my second eyes came out, I saw the fire become very large. The whole gathering looked like they were sitting in the fire. The fire then went back to its normal size, but as I continued staring at it, I saw a lion in it. I trembled when I looked at it. Then the lion opened its mouth and swallowed me. The next thing I remember seeing was the lion spitting out another lion. That other lion was me. I felt the energy of the lion and roared with great authority. The power scared the people. They knew what had happened. They could see that I had turned into a lion.⁷

What Bo was describing was not a 'simple' one-time transformation from human into lion, which would be miraculous in its own right, but rather, he was talking about a transformation that was permanent, giving him the power to shapeshift at will. Bo says,

Once you turn into a lion, you always have the lion inside of you. Just thinking about the time that you turned into a lion brings back its power. You do not have to see the lion in the fire again. It does not have to swallow you again and remake you into a lion. The transformation has to take place only once and then you have the power for life. You may also see and become other animals. We doctors can become many animals – eland, kudu, gemsbok, giraffe, birds and many other creatures. These transformations bring us a special power.⁸

What are we to make of these statements? When Ngwaga Osele speaks of growing animal fur and claws, are we to take his story literally? Did he really undergo a theriomorphic transformation? That is, did his human flesh and bones morph into the flesh and bones of a lion? Bo said that when he roared as a lion 'with great authority', the people were frightened because they could *see* he had transformed into a lion.

An internal shapeshifter believes he has fully taken on the consciousness and behaviour of some animal, even though he retains his human form. This type of shapeshifting is what occurred among prehistoric hunters and the berserkers and is most likely the explanation for the Bushmen's beliefs in their transformations. The power of the transformation might be aided by sacred ritual, psychotropic drugs or altered states of consciousness brought on through meditation. In any case, even without physical transformation, subverting one's consciousness to take on that of an animal is no mean feat. As for the people who said they saw the transformation, it is possible that, convinced of the efficacy of the rituals and caught up in the moment, they experienced a form of hysteria.

Internal shapeshifting might also be what happens during voodoo rituals when various *lwas*, voodoo spirits, enter the bodies of practitioners, taking possession of them, and causing them to speak and behave in the manner of those spirits. Mauro Peressini and Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique give a vivid description of that moment of spirit possession in their book *Vodou*:

During ceremonies, when lwa accept an invitation to manifest themselves to participants, they often enter the chosen individuals like an untamed force. The symptoms signaling their arrival – a change in expression, breathing or the look in the person's eye – are followed by convulsions with loss of balance. The possessed individuals may leap about, startle and shout. Their gestures are abrupt and uncoordinated. Other participants take care of them, hold them and prevent them from hurting themselves.⁹

A calm follows, at which point others can communicate with the *lwa* now in possession of the individual's body. For voodooists, possession can happen at any time, and it might last for minutes, hours, days or longer; the possessed individual has no control over the possession. One cannot help but notice the similarities between possession by voodoo *lwas* and possession by diabolical entities as noted in Christian and other religions. This is not to say voodoo *lwas* are evil; the comparison here is only in how the possessed person behaves. There is no true transformation of the human form in either case, yet there can be no doubt that on the psychological level, possessed individuals take on the personas of the possessing entities, whether they be good or evil, or simply benign.

A strange and hurtful perspective on the notion of the evil shapeshifter arose during the 2015 terrorist attack in Paris on the headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo*, in which twelve people were killed. According to a report by journalist Dana Kennedy, some Muslims living in France blamed Jews for the attacks. While history provides ample evidence of innocent Jews being maligned for the world's ills, this fabrication was especially bizarre. Kennedy interviewed several Muslim Parisians about the attack. In interviewing a young Muslim hashish seller who went only by the name 'Mohamed', Kennedy wrote,

He also called the Paris terrorist attacks 'un complot,' or conspiracy, and launched into a lengthy explanation of the 'magical Jews' behind it. They were not ordinary Jews, he said, but a 'hybrid race of shape shifters' who have extraordinary abilities. 'They know how to get in everywhere,' he said. 'They are master manipulators.'¹⁰

One might think the drug dealer was speaking of shapeshifters, metaphorically, as people capable of adapting to different cultures or situations, but his use of the word 'magical', and the phrase 'hybrid race', clearly leaves one with the impression he was speaking of actual shapeshifters.

Although a belief in ancient gods and goddesses might impart in a culture a lingering belief in divine shapeshifters, there seems to

be no question that, in many indigenous cultures and perhaps even more advanced cultures, the possibility that humans can become something other than human persists. Whether the belief lies in actual physical transformation, internal psychological transformation or some combination of both is irrelevant; the point is that for some of us at least, shapeshifters are real.

3

The Power of Transformation

The three men follow their leader through the scorching desert heat. They do not know where they are going, or why. They only know their teacher has asked them to follow him to the top of this desolate mountain far from prying eyes; they trust him and follow.

On the mountaintop, a sudden change comes over their beloved teacher, Jesus. To the astonished eyes of Peter, James and John, Jesus appears to glow with a radiant light. His face becomes as bright as the Sun, and his robes are dazzling white. The disciples no longer see him as Jesus, the rabbi they have followed throughout Galilee, but as some heavenly being, and that perception is confirmed when the long-dead prophets Moses and Elias appear and engage in conversation with Jesus. The disciples are terrified – as anyone would be – and cower on the ground when a mighty voice comes out of the clouds to announce, ‘This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.’

Jesus comes to them and touches them, telling them not to be afraid, and when the disciples lift up their eyes, they find the human figure of Jesus standing before them, and all is quiet on the mountaintop.

The story of Jesus’ transfiguration is related most eloquently in Matthew 17:1–13 of the New Testament. For centuries, people have speculated on the nature of that awesome event. What had the disciples witnessed? Matthew writes that Jesus said, ‘Tell the vision



Peter Paul Rubens, *Jesus Transfigured before his Disciples*, 1605, oil on canvas.

to no one,' until after he rose from the dead. The implication here seems to be that Jesus had given his disciples a glimpse into his nature as God; they had seen him in his divine form, yet he meant to keep that part of his nature secret from the public until the time he chose to reveal it. Through the Transfiguration, the disciples were made privy to one of the most awe-inspiring acts of shapeshifting ever recorded. Its message is clear and powerful to Christians, as it demonstrates the dual nature of Jesus as God and man.

In Hinduism, it is said Swami Vallalar (1823–1874) was transfigured as 'an alchemized Light body', and the Buddha was reported to have transfigured twice, at the moment of his enlightenment and the moment of his death. The Transfiguration of Jesus is freighted with meaning that transcends Christianity, just as the meaning of these other examples transcends their respective religions. Looking at them devoid of their religious trappings, as difficult as that may be, the events are revealed in their most basic terms as extremely powerful examples of shapeshifting.

It has already been shown how ancient gods demonstrated their power through shapeshifting, often to the detriment of their human followers. But then, humans usurp the power of shapeshifting, settling it on shamans and wizards, and creating shapeshifter characters in mythology and folklore. Shapeshifters capture the imagination of the

common people and, whether they can themselves transform or not, they are keenly aware of the power of the shapeshifter.

The power lies in the result, of course, but it is also present in the *desire* to be able to shapeshift, the powerful lure of transforming one's self. For those who may feel marginalized by their society, or those who experience prejudice, hatred and bigotry, or those who simply wish they were richer, smarter, happier or better-looking – the list here is endless – shapeshifting represents a way out of their dilemmas, even if only in their imaginations. Rare is the individual who has not, if only for a split second, yearned figuratively to step out of his or her skin to become someone else, to escape an unpleasant situation or simply to become 'better' in some fashion. As William Shakespeare wrote, in *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene I, 'God has given you one face, and you make yourself another.' Although not everyone will readily admit to it, shapeshifting is a universal fantasy.

This innate, but subconscious, desire to shapeshift is so strong that it manifests in a belief among some people in flesh-and-blood shapeshifters. It would be a mistake to think that such a belief is held only by 'primitive', 'ignorant' cultures. On the contrary, it is a widespread belief that is evident in cultures all around the world, regardless of their socio-economic or intellectual accomplishments.

One of the most controversial proponents of the reality of shapeshifters is David Icke, an English author and conspiracy theorist. The author of over twenty books and numerous DVDs, Icke bills himself as a 'full time investigator into who and what is really controlling the world'. He has lectured in over 25 countries, sometimes speaking for up to ten hours to audiences that cut across the political spectrum.

In 1990 a psychic told Icke, who was at that time a respected BBC sports broadcaster and Green Party spokesman, that he had been placed on Earth for a purpose and would soon begin receiving messages from the spirit world. Shortly thereafter, he began referring to himself as Son of the Godhead.

His conspiracy theories are based upon his belief that a powerful cabal known as the Babylonian Brotherhood is pushing humanity towards a fascist state called the New World Order. Fascism and its

supporters are not new by any means, but what gives Icke's theory such an unusual twist is that he believes the Babylonian Brotherhood to consist of shapeshifting reptilian humanoids.

According to Icke, the reptilian shapeshifters use the Moon and the rings of Saturn, all of which the creatures constructed, as bases from which they broadcast what we perceive as reality but what Icke contends is actually an 'artificial sense of self and the world'. His theory says that the blood-drinking, flesh-eating, lizard-like reptilians, who originally came from the star system Alpha Draconis, live among us in secret underground bases. These reptilian aliens came to Earth thousands of years ago and mated with humans, thereby creating reptilian humanoids with the ability to shapeshift fully into human forms. These shapeshifters have infiltrated all levels of world governments, businesses and even sports and entertainment; Henry Kissinger, Dick Cheney, Al Gore, Queen Elizabeth and former U.S. Presidents Bill Clinton (and his wife, Hillary) and George W. Bush are just some of the many shapeshifters who are secretly steering the destiny of humanity. Conspiracy followers suggest Donald Trump may also be a reptilian shapeshifter and some go so far as to posit that all U.S. presidents have been inheritors of the reptilian bloodline and so are shapeshifters.

While this alien reptilian shapeshifter theory might seem far-fetched, Icke claims that over twelve million people in 47 countries subscribe to it, and the Internet has scores of video clips claiming to show celebrities shapeshifting into reptiles.

What is the attraction of such a theory? Perhaps it might be that many people are at a loss to explain the chaos and misrule so evident in the world and have an easier time believing alien reptilian shapeshifters are behind it all, rather than mere mortals just like themselves. Such a theory, as bizarre as it may seem, absolves them of any responsibility for making the world a better place, since they could not possibly overcome the shapeshifters, but it also gives them a twisted and fatalistic sense of peace precisely because they cannot act against the aliens.

David Icke is not the only person to see a connection between aliens and shapeshifters. Author, speaker and ufologist M. J. Baniyas

theorizes that reports of encounters between humans and aliens, which Baniyas refers to as 'non-human intelligence', or 'NHI', vary widely in descriptions of what NHIs look like, how they act, how they sound, what they wear, what their vehicles and equipment look like, and so on. Why would there be such variances?

Baniyas answers that question by first discussing the Co-creation Hypothesis:

Co-Creation assumes that a contact event with the NHI is so totally alien that the human brain cannot comprehend the event in an objective way. What occurs instead is a sort of experiential analogue; the human brain generates a working, albeit false, reality to understand the NHI encounter event. Strange lights in the sky, flying saucers, orange orbs, Greys, Reptilians, abductions with needles, hybrid babies, and the other aspects of the UFO narrative are generated by the brain in an attempt to compartmentalize an experience with a completely alien and incomprehensible Other.'

Baniyas notes that, before there can be a Co-Creation Hypothesis, we must assume that first, non-human intelligences exist and, second, they are able to interact in some way with humans, although the interaction would be incomprehensible to humans. Third, we must assume that NHIs could exist without a physical body; that, in fact, they might be some type of energy, or force with which we are unfamiliar, and of which we have no understanding. Once we grant those assumptions, we can move on to the next point in the hypothesis, which explains how communication could occur between humans and NHI:

Due to this total 'alienness,' the human mind is unable to observe and/or remember the NHI in its objective sense. That is, when a human 'lays eyes' on the NHI, or experiences the NHI, the brain is unable to process the reality of the event or being as it is. Instead, the mind generates a forgery. It replaces the objective NHI with a simulacrum, or a hyperreal conglomeration of psychological, social and cultural ideologies

that 'create' a false reality and memory of the being, event or thing.²

In other words, the human brain creates the 'reality' of the encounter, while the NHI, according to Baniyas, 'responds automatically and instantaneously by becoming that reality; the forgery does not become authentic, the forgery is authentic'. Since each person who claims to have had an encounter with an NHI – or as they are more commonly called, 'extraterrestrials', or simply, 'space aliens' – will subconsciously conjure up his or her personal frames of reference to explain the encounter, the NHIs will respond in any number of presentations, in effect causing them to be shapeshifters.

In a sense, our brains seem to delude us in such cases, but there might also be actual delusions at work when studying shapeshifters. A case in point is the strange psychological disorder called the Fregoli delusion. This disorder is named after the Italian stage actor Leopoldo Fregoli, who entranced Victorian audiences in Europe with his impersonations of celebrities of his day, such luminaries as William Gladstone, Otto von Bismarck and Victor Hugo.

In 1927 a Parisian household servant and ardent theatregoer visited two psychiatrists and told them she was plagued by two of her favourite actresses, Sarah Bernhardt and Robine, who she was convinced had taken on the forms of people around her – friends, doctors, former employers and even strangers in the street. She could no longer keep her mind on her work and became so angry that she attacked a person she believed was Robine in disguise. Nothing the doctors could do would persuade her of her delusion.³

In a 2016 article in *The Telegraph*, psychiatrist Dr Karel de Pauw talked about the rare Fregoli delusion in which sufferers are certain everyone they meet is actually one single person and that person is bent on doing them harm. De Pauw saw the delusion in a ten-year-old boy and said,

These patients think the person has assumed various cunning disguises and are impossible to reason with . . . If you say, 'But that nurse is a woman, she can't be your father,' they say

– 'Ah, but you don't know how clever my father is, you don't know him as I do, so you can't pick up the clues.'⁴

A similar psychological disorder is Capgras delusion, in which a person believes someone familiar to him has been replaced by an imposter. Both delusions are part of a larger group of disorders collectively called delusional misidentification and made famous by the neurologist Oliver Sacks's 1985 best-selling book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. Such delusions are rare but to one who is subject to them, it might seem the world is filled with shapeshifters.

The shapeshifter is a powerful image, a powerful character that resides in each of us, albeit in ways that most likely do not involve physically transforming into another person, or animal. The psychologist Carl Gustav Jung believed that on a basic subconscious level, we all identify with certain types of archetypal characters. The primary archetypes are the Persona, the Shadow, the Wise Elder, the Divine Child, the Trickster, the Great Mother and the animus/anima, also called the Shapeshifter. Together, they are part of the 'collective unconscious', a collection of symbols universally understood by all humans but only on an unconscious level, and revealed to humans across generations and cultures via the process of dreaming.

Jung says the anima archetype appears in men. It is his primordial image of woman and represents the man's biological expectation of women. But it is also symbolic of a man's feminine possibilities, his 'contrasexual' tendencies. The animus archetype is the analogous image of the masculine that occurs in women. It is easy to see why these combined archetypes are also called the shapeshifter, as both feminine and masculine elements exist in every human being but not necessarily always in balance. It is the imbalance of the natures that is representative of shapeshifting. The Greek myth of Tiresias, who experienced life as both a man and a woman, is a good example of the give-and-take shapeshifting of the animus/anima.

Tony Crisp is a prolific writer and one of the world's foremost authorities on dreams and dream interpretations. Here, he explores the sexual dual nature of the shapeshifter:

In Western society, there is little understanding of the power and influence of the shapeshifter. In fact, most people only meet the negative aspect of this flow of influence in their life.

The source of the shapeshifter power is not in its ability to move between different guises. That is only the external expression of something very profound. Form is only one polarity of our existence. At the other pole is formlessness, the spirit without physical shape, the void of Buddhism that is nothing but holds all possibility within it. At this level, the paradox of sexual difference is resolved. We are male and female and more, so the idea of soul mates does not seem possible, for we are a whole being.

As we mature and realize these paradoxical opposites of our nature, and as we identify less with the form we have as a body, the power of shapeshifter comes more fully into our experience.

What it brings with it is what might be called involved detachment. Usually we might think of detachment as meaning a sort of avoidance of something, especially people or physical pleasure. However, the very term shapeshifter includes the word shape, and so implies form, even though the form can be changed. This is because the archetype of shapeshifter stands at the very balance between form and formless; identification and the void. With its power, we can live in the world and yet not be possessed by it. We can be involved in events or relationships and yet not be dependent upon them for our identity or sense of self. In fact, we know that we are paradoxical in nature, having form and yet at the same time existing as formless spirit.⁵

Most people who subscribe to some religious belief, or who consider themselves spiritual, would assent to Crisp's notion of a formed physical body and formless spirit dichotomy. They might have different names for 'spirit', such as soul, conscience or mind, but all would agree to some intangible, ineffable, possibly eternal force housed within our physical forms. The idea that we can become more in touch

with the spiritual side of our nature through prayer, meditation, yoga, art and even physical activity, including sex, is well known and has been studied by both medical and psychological researchers. All this leads to the question of how much we can control the dual nature of our selves – in effect, how much we can shapeshift, transform into another, better self.

The power of transformation is different from the power that results in *being* a shapeshifter. Mild-mannered scientist Bruce Banner is a normal human being in every respect until his emotions get out of control and he shapeshifts into the huge, green mountain of muscular rage known as the Incredible Hulk. This is true for many comic book superheroes – their awesome powers are available to them only when they have shapeshifted into their superhero forms.

But there is power in the *process* of transformation as well. As M. J. Baniyas theorizes, it is the *process* of transformation that may give us the power someday to enable communication between humans and non-human intelligences. It was the *process* of Jesus' powerful Transfiguration, witnessed by the three disciples, that set them to wondering about the true nature of the man they only knew as an itinerant rabbi from Galilee. And it well may be the *process* of our own internal seeking after transformation that could make us all better people, and the world a better place.

Fay, Faerie and Folk Shapeshifters: Europe

Once upon a time, a king was out hunting with his retinue. Spying a fat hare, the king gave chase, caught the hare and was about to kill it when, to his astonishment, the hare spoke to him. The hare said she was a shapeshifting fairy named Candide and that if the king granted her life, she would give the king his choice of three wishes: to make his son, Prince Cherry, the handsomest, richest or most powerful of all princes. The king agreed but, being a wise and noble king, wished only that his son would be a good man. And so the fairy Candide promised to point out the prince's mistakes, that he might learn by them.

Candide gave Prince Cherry a gold ring that would prick his finger whenever he did something wrong. He wore it, and true to the fairy's promise, it did prick him when he misbehaved; it didn't take the prince long to dispose of the ring, and his behaviour worsened. Annoyed with his long-time teacher's admonitions to him whenever he abused his power, Prince Cherry banished the tutor.

Then, one day, the prince saw a beautiful young woman named Zelia in the marketplace and asked her to marry him. Aware of his bad behaviour and short temper, she refused him. Prince Cherry's worthless friends all said she should be punished for failing to obey him, so Cherry had her locked up in the dungeon.

For that offence, the fairy Candide turned Cherry into a strange animal, a mixture of a serpent, a lion, a bull and a wolf. Cherry ran away but was caught in a bear trap and put on display in a menagerie. While he was away, his father, the king, died, and Cherry's old tutor

was made king since no one knew what had happened to the prince, only that he had disappeared, and good riddance to him. One day, an escaped tiger attacked the keeper of the menagerie. The moment Cherry felt the desire to come to the keeper's aid, the door of his cage flew open, and he chased off the tiger. For that, the fairy transformed him into a dog.

For some time, Cherry lived happily as a dog. Making his doggie rounds, he saw a woman begging for food. Feeling pity for her, he gave her his scrap of bread. He recognized the woman to be Zelia, just as she was dragged away again to the dungeon. He was filled with remorse for his treatment of her, and the fairy turned him into a white pigeon.

Cherry flew in search of Zelia and finding her, perched on her shoulder. Zelia proclaimed her love for the white bird, which was enough to break the shapeshifting spell Candide had put upon him. Now that Cherry was restored to human form and to a good and kind nature, Zelia married him and the two returned to rule his kingdom, where, of course, they lived happily ever after.¹

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When shapeshifters and shapeshifting transformations are found in European legends and folktales, they often convey some message to the audience. The message is one designed to show people, especially young people, the proper way to behave. There is often a moral attached to these stories: those who lead good lives are rewarded, while those who choose to live in a bad or morally wrong manner are punished for their behaviour. The story of Prince Cherry, an anonymous tale collected by the Brothers Grimm, with its many shapeshifting elements, illustrates the value of compassion, kindness, obedience, love and generosity in an instructional but not didactic manner. Whether of royal blood or not, the message of the story is clear: be good to others, and you will thrive. Be evil, and you will be changed into an animal.

These shapeshifting tales frequently depict shapeshifting as punishment for bad behaviour, levied upon someone who truly deserves it. But sometimes the transformation comes as a curse

brought on by a witch, sorcerer or some other evil person against an innocent individual.

There is no doubt that Prince Cherry deserved his comeuppance, even if it arrived in the form of shapeshifting into animals. While he gradually learned from his mistakes, and each subsequent transformation was less odious than the previous one, his restoration comes not through his own enlightenment and volition, but from the professed love of Zelia. The moral here is that the love of a good woman brings out the best in a man. This motif is central to shapeshifter stories that are collectively called 'animal bridegroom' stories, in which a man is punished for his transgressions by being turned into an animal or monster but is ultimately redeemed by a woman who can 'see' through his outward exterior to the good possibilities of his true nature. Her love for him, even in his transformed state, saves him. 'Beauty and the Beast' is one of the best examples of such a shapeshifter story.

The messages in the 'animal bridegroom' stories were instrumental in teaching young women that men must be saved from their baser instincts and could only be saved by the love of a virtuous – a key word here – woman. These stories elevated the 'value' of a woman and promised her even greater value since, by her redeeming the man, she would win not only his love, but his wealth and property as well; apparently, virtue is *not* only its own reward.

Sometimes a man, too, may be rewarded with fabulous wealth by a female shapeshifter, as in the case of the *mouras encantadas* of Portugal rewarding men who rescue them from their enchantment. Similar stories are told of the *Margot la Fée*, or more simply, *Margot* fairies that are native to Brittany. Generally kind and protective, the *Margots* can be stirred to deadly violence if provoked. Like the *mouras encantadas*, the *Margots* are associated with megaliths, caves and treasures. *Margot* fairies, like many fairies, are shapeshifters with magical powers and, like their Portuguese counterparts, spend much of their lives as snakes, in which form they are most vulnerable.

In a Breton tale that illustrates this vulnerability, a man working in the fields encountered a *Margot*, who instructed him to take a washtub to a bridge at sunrise. There, she said, he would find a green snake, which he must cover with the washtub and sit upon it all day.

At sunrise, the man went to the appointed location, saw the snake and covered it with the washtub. Despite the taunting of passers-by, the man remained seated upon the tub all day. At sunset, the *Margot* appeared, telling the man to remove the washtub. When he did, he found the snake had disappeared, and in its place was a beautiful young woman, the *Margot's* daughter, who transformed into a snake one day each year and would have been killed had it not been for the man's kindness. The *Margot* rewarded the man with gold and silver that kept him rich for the rest of his life.

As shapeshifters, *Margots* often transform into young or old women, as well as animals. While a *Margot* may happily tend to her livestock and that of her neighbours, she might also take a shine to a handsome young shepherd and keep him in a cave for herself.

Stories like 'Beauty and the Beast', in which a beautiful maiden lives with, or even marries, a monstrous being, also teach tolerance, compassion and empathy for the Other, since through transformation, the Other is revealed to be human, a fitting metaphor for a world full of racial and religious intolerance and bigotry.

The transformations in 'Prince Cherry' are brought about through the agency of a fairy who is also a shapeshifter. European folktales and legends are full of shapeshifting entities that are neither gods nor shamans nor wizards. They are supernatural creatures that originate in an imaginary, mystical world, yet are capable of interacting with the mundane world of humans. Many of these shapeshifting beings are faerie-folk – that is, members of a wide variety of supernatural creatures loosely called 'fairies'. Our modern conception of a fairy is a tiny, gossamer-winged, glowing being, usually female, that may have some magic power. Tinkerbell, originally created by J. M. Barrie in his children's book *Peter Pan* and later given broader popularity through Walt Disney, is a prime example of the modern idea of a fairy.

But fairies have been around for a long time. The ancient Greeks and Romans wrote of them, and they were not all cute, harmless little things. Not all fairies were shapeshifters; we will concern ourselves only with the shapeshifter varieties. And just as love plays an important role in 'animal bridegroom' stories, so too is it a major theme in many shapeshifting fairy legends.

The selkie is a water-dwelling fairy believed to have originated in the Orkney and Shetland islands. It can shapeshift from seal into male or female human form. It does so by shedding its seal skin, a risky endeavour, since it must return to that same skin to become a seal once again.

Many of the selkie tales are about these creatures falling in love with humans, shedding their seal forms, and coming ashore to live with their human lovers. They might live ashore for many years, but the sea is always calling to them, and many will eventually return to the sea in their seal forms. It is said for a woman to meet a male selkie, she must go to the shoreline and cry seven tears into the water. These romantic tragedies are common in stories from Scotland, Ireland and Iceland.

The nature of the selkie might be debated. While some legends tell of selkies saving drowning seamen, others say they sing songs to lure people to the sea and their deaths by drowning. It may be that selkies themselves are the souls of drowned seamen.

It is interesting to note the animal form of a selkie is a seal, since the origin of legends about mermaids and sirens, such as those that called to Ulysses in Homer's *Odyssey*, might possibly be attributed to ancient seamen mistaking seals for such imaginary creatures.

Another form of water shapeshifter is the *rusalka* of Slavic mythology. The *rusalki* are the spirits of young women who either committed suicide because of an unhappy or abusive marriage, or who were murdered by drowning because they carried an unwanted pregnancy. In Ukraine, these spirits transform into beautiful women that lure unwary young men to the water. Once seduced in the embrace of a *rusalka*, the victim's feet are entangled in her long red hair, and he is pulled under the water. Her body becomes slimy, and her victim cannot grab hold to climb to the surface and escape her; he drowns as she laughs.

In some parts of Eastern Europe, it is believed that for a week in June, the *rusalki* emerge from the water in their beguiling feminine forms to dance and cavort in nearby woods and meadows. Young men are drawn to them and join in the dance, following the *rusalki* to the water, where the partying ends for them in a most unpleasant way.

There are at least three morals expressed in *rusalki* legends. The first is a warning to young women to remain chaste, lest they become pregnant out of wedlock and die for their offence, either through suicide or murder, thus turning them into *rusalki*. The second moral again directs young women not to be rash in marriage, but to choose their husbands wisely to ensure a happy marriage. The third message is to young men. It is simple and direct: keep your pants on until you are married, and married to a chaste and moral woman.

One of the few creatures resistant to the seductive powers of a *rusalka* is a *vedmak*. Also found in Ukrainian folktales, the *vedmak* is a male witch, or warlock, but, unlike the typical female witch, a *vedmak* might also do good things. For example, a *vedmak* might treat people and animals decently and sometimes protect humanity by preventing witches from doing evil. On the other hand, a *vedmak* is thought to be in league with the Devil and might cause harm to mankind by killing livestock, destroying a harvest or sending disease to the people. *Vedmaks*, like witches, are consummate shapeshifters, their favourite animal forms being a horse, wolf or moth; they can also transform into any inanimate object.

A far less attractive water shapeshifter is the *vodyanoi*, found in Russia, with variants in Poland, Belarus and the Balkans. Said to be the unclean spirit of a man who committed suicide, or died without the last rites of the Church, the *vodyanoi* lives in deep pools or mill-ponds. By all accounts, he is an ugly creature – sometimes slimy and bluish, bloated and crowned with reeds; sometimes roughly human in appearance but with a tail, horns, large paws and eyes like burning coals; sometimes like a huge man covered with grass and moss, or shaggy white fur, or with scales. When it transforms into human form, the *vodyanoi* takes on the appearance of an old man with green hair and beard, or a white-bearded peasant wearing a red shirt, or a naked woman with enormous breasts who sits on a log, combing her dripping hair. In addition to his typical guises, the *vodyanoi* could also shapeshift into a child; a huge, mossy fish; a swan; a flying log with little wings; or perhaps most peculiarly, a bouquet of red flowers floating on the water. The *vodyanoi* hates humans, and it seems the creature exists only to drag unsuspecting humans into the water to drown them.

The drowned become the *vodyanoi's* slaves, while they might take attractive females as wives.

Scotland has many deep and mysterious lochs, such as Loch Ness, with its eponymous monster, 'Nessie', as well as many other bodies of water. According to Scottish tales, these watery places are the abodes of kelpies. A kelpie, also called a water-horse, is a malevolent horse-spirit shapeshifter that preys on and devours humans. The kelpie has been around for a long time – Pict stone carvings dating back to the eighth and ninth centuries depict them. Although in the Victorian era artists frequently showed the kelpie as a beautiful maiden, the original conception of a kelpie was quite different.

Often described as a powerful black horse with the power to extend the length of its back to accommodate several riders, the kelpie would carry off hapless riders into the water, where they would drown and it would eat them, throwing up their entrails on the shore. Frequently, children, mistaking the kelpie for a horse, would mount one for a ride, only to find they could not dismount. They might simply pet the kelpie and discover, to their horror, their hand stuck to the beast. In either case, the children cannot escape being dragged into the water, where they perish.

The kelpie could shapeshift into human form, almost always male, sometimes young and handsome and sometimes not. One Scots tale tells of an old, shaggy man sitting on a bridge, patching a pair of trousers. Another man, suspecting the old man to be a kelpie, strikes him on the head with a stick, which does, indeed, cause the kelpie to revert to its true water-horse form and dive into the river to its lair. Some stories say the kelpie keeps its hooves in its human form, thereby associating it with Satan, who is often depicted with hoofed feet.

Like many folktales and legends, kelpie stories were instructional and moralistic. They scared children away from playing near dangerous bodies of water and warned young women of the perils of attraction to a strange male.

Dryads are one of the oldest forms of shapeshifting fairies, originating in ancient Greece and figuring greatly in Greek mythology and in the *Metamorphoses*, by the Roman poet Ovid. Usually

female, dryads are shapeshifting fairies with the ability to change into the trees they are charged to protect. They can also transform into beautiful women with great sex appeal, which often made them targets of lusty gods and humans. Ovid's poem is full of dryads transforming into trees to escape rape.

Beautiful young maidens figure in many European folktales and are often associated with shapeshifters in various ways. Tales of maidens abducted and held captive by dragons are common, but in Romanian and Bulgarian tales, the dragon, or *zmeu*, is often a shapeshifter that can readily transform into human shape, specifically an anthropomorphized dragon man. Considering David Icke's alien reptilian shapeshifter theory, is it possible that these 'dragon men' were reptoids?

Another shapeshifter fond of kidnapping young women is the *lesby*, an entity in Slavic folk culture said to be the offspring of the union between a woman and a demon. A woodland spirit, the *lesby* lives in the woods and is charged with protecting the woods and their animals. When it is not carrying off women, it likes to engage in less heinous activities such as confusing people travelling through the woods by changing the path they walk, or by imitating the human voice and calling to them from different directions. It can also make people sick and might tickle them to death.

In its normal appearance, the *lesby* looks like a tall man, although its pale skin, green eyes, hooves, horns, tail and beard made from living vines and grasses reveal its inhuman nature. As a shapeshifter, the *lesby* can transform into any plant or animal it chooses, but it can also shapeshift into human form, typically that of a peasant with glowing eyes. The *lesby* can also shrink itself to only a few centimetres, or it can stretch to the height of the tallest trees.

Another common shapeshifting nature spirit is the *puca*. Found in Celtic mythology, *puca* stories are common in Wales, Ireland and the west of Scotland. Like the *lesby*, a *puca* is a mischievous creature that loves to play pranks on unsuspecting humans. *Pucas* are sociable creatures that love riddles and can also give good advice to humans. They can assume many terrifying shapes as shapeshifters. A common form is similar to a kelpie, a black horse with flowing mane and

luminescent orange eyes. They might also transform into rabbits, goats, dogs or goblins, but no matter what form they take, they are always covered with dark fur.

Pucas are feared but respected by the people, who know that, if they treat *pucas* well, a *puca* will do good things for them. William Shakespeare made good use of this belief in the character of Puck, a *puca* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The shapeshifter motif has also been used to illustrate themes larger than those relative to personal and social behaviour. In the Terrace of the Triton in the Palácio da Pena in Sintra, Portugal, there is a large sculpture of the monstrous sea-god Triton mounted above a fanciful arch. The lower half of Triton's body has fins and is covered in fish scales. He squats in a giant clam shell, brimming over with shells and corals, spilling down over the arch below. Triton's torso is that of a muscular human, and his bearded face, fierce-looking and brutish, seems more animal than human. In his outstretched hands,



Isaak Izrailevich Brodskii, *Lesbii*, No. 1, 1906. A *lesby* is a mischievous Slavic shapeshifter, a woodland spirit with a penchant for carrying off young women and confusing travellers in the woods.

Triton holds two tree branches that stem from a large tree sprouting from his head. A profusion of leaves and vines emerge from the tree and climb up and around the window above the sculpture.

One theory about the sculpture holds that it represents the transmutation of the species, an early theory of evolution that pre-dates Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* but was made popular in Robert Chambers's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, published in 1844. The theory describes all life beginning in the sea, and then evolving to land forms of life. Another theory about the sculpture says that it simply memorializes the half-fish, half-human god Triton, who supposedly inhabited a cave on one of the beaches in the area.

Most of the shapeshifters found in various European cultures are ancient, their roots going back to pre-Christian societies. With the rise of Christianity in Europe, clerics had to find a way to eliminate these vestiges of paganism. The best way was to demonize them, associating them with the Devil and warning all who still believed in them that eternal perdition would be their fate after death. Ridicule worked as well, with people who still believed in the ancient entities held up as foolish, to be scorned and mocked by the community. For the most part, the Christian campaign worked. Stories of Christian saints rebuking or destroying faerie-folk and magical beings were retold in the communities by the clerics. Sometimes these stories were even illustrated in carvings or paintings in the churches. These once-feared entities no longer seemed as evil and menacing as they once were, and they certainly did not need to be venerated. But people can be stubborn, and ancient beliefs sometimes die hard. Despite the Church's best efforts, there were still people, especially in remote, rural locations, who were not ready entirely to give up a belief in such magical creatures. There are still people today who observe superstitious customs lest they anger these ancient creatures.

A curious story from Antwerp, Belgium, tells of the time, centuries ago, when priests and townspeople routed out demons, goblins and other evil creatures from the woods surrounding their city, using religious ritual and relying on images of the Virgin Mary. They banished the monsters to the sea and, satisfied they had

removed them all, returned to their homes content. But they had *not* expelled them all.

The *lange wapper*, or 'long wapper', hid in the canals of Antwerp, nursing its grudge against humanity and biding its time until the townspeople had given up their purge. The *lange wapper* is a shapeshifter with no set form; it can be anything and can be as small as a mouse or as tall as a building. It likes to transform into a creature with legs so long it can peer into the windows of buildings and terrify the occupants. Like a pond skater insect, the *lange wapper's* long, spindly legs allow it to walk across water.

Unsuspecting people can be taken in by the *lange wapper's* cruel pranks when it appears as a poor beggar, a beautiful woman, a priest, a puppy or kitten, or any form that will evoke empathy from its victim. One of its favourite forms is that of a newborn baby, crying and apparently abandoned. When some kind soul picks up the baby, it grows heavier and heavier, until finally, the person drops it in alarm. The *lange wapper* is fond of following drunkards home, frightening them to death. It can replicate itself many times over, filling spaces with its monstrous apparitions. The *lange wapper* is not as hard on children as it is on adults and may shapeshift into a child to play with them, although it will probably end the game with some prank.

Although the *lange wapper* escaped the banishment that befell its monster brethren, it found itself surrounded by churches and the trappings of Christianity and has not been seen in quite some time. Perhaps it has voluntarily gone back to the sea to rejoin the other monsters.

Another survivor of the Christian purge is the *mourioche* in Brittany. The origins of this shapeshifter are unclear. One tale says it was once a Breton man or woman who sold his or her soul to the Devil in exchange for a magical ointment; another says it was a werewolf. In either case, the *mourioche* has an association with the Devil. Some say it may *be* the Devil.

In appearance, the *mourioche* often resembles a kelpie, or water-horse, and like the kelpie, will carry hapless riders into a lake or river or, at the least, toss them into a muddy ditch. But it will also transform



The figure of Triton reigns supreme in the Terrace of the Triton at the Pena Palace in Sintra, Portugal.

into a pig, cow, sheep or colt, often with a pair of muscular arms. A nocturnal shapeshifter, it might waylay someone on the road, jumping on their back and forcing them to carry it until they drop from exhaustion.

The *mourioche* is partial to elaborate, cruel pranks. In one story, a *mourioche* changed itself into an abandoned ewe that was found by a farmer and brought to his barn. When the farmer checked on the ewe in the morning, he found, in its place, a cow. The next day, the cow was gone, replaced by a horse. On the third day, the horse disappeared, and the ewe returned. It spoke to the farmer, making fun of his confusion. Then the farmer saw that all his animals had been slaughtered. He grabbed his gun, but before he could shoot the *mourioche*, it ran off, destroying half the barn and abducting the farmer's three children. He never saw them again, but, in their place, the *mourioche* left a golden necklace.

In Brittany, parents still scare their children to bed with threats of the *mourioche* taking them if they do not obey. It is also said of a frightened person that 'il a eu peur comme s'il avait vu Mourioche' (he was scared as though he saw Mourioche). There is also a variant of the *mourioche* in Brittany called the *fausserole*, which takes the shape of a white beast, dog or calf.

Said to be the descendants of Greek nymphs who fled the onslaught of Christianity in the Mediterranean, *fayettes*, 'little fairies', live in the Loire valley area of France and probably most resemble our modern notion of fairies like Tinkerbell. Although the *fayettes* are now much tinier than their former nymph selves, their magical powers have not diminished. Guarding caves and forests, they can be seen dancing in the woods of the Beaujolais. Like most fairies, they have a penchant for stealing babies and leaving fairy babies, changelings, in their place, although the human baby can be returned by taking the changeling to the entrance of the *fayettes'* cave and threatening it with harm; the *fayettes* will quickly make the switch. Other than stealing babies, the *fayettes* are harmless. As shapeshifters, during the day they transform into moles, all except for their pretty little hands.

When Christianity came to Sicily, it had to overcome thousands of years of popular belief in supernatural entities from ancient Etruscan, Greek and Roman civilizations. As elsewhere in Europe, the churches destroyed these old entities or maligned them, reducing them to ridiculous caricatures. But, in Sicily too, some of these mythological creatures escaped the wrath of Christianity, and many of the common people continued to look over their shoulders, knowing full well that supernatural beings, other than Christian saints and angels, still roamed the countryside and were not to be challenged.

The *doñas de fuera* are one such group of fairies still to be found in Sicilian folklore. Mostly benevolent fairies, the *doñas de fuera* willingly associated with humans, mostly women, although in secret; their name comes from the women who joined their groups. Elf-like in appearance, the *doñas de fuera*, both male and female, were often described as beauties who dressed all in red, black or white. As beautiful as they were, their feet were hooves, paws or simply round.

As shapeshifters, they often transformed into cats or dangerous, murderous beasts called *ayodon*.

The *doñas de fuera* spent much of their time playing musical instruments, dancing, feasting and having sex. Living a life like that, it is no wonder humans frequently joined them. The only rule imposed upon human followers by the *doñas de fuera* was that humans should never speak of God, the Virgin Mary or Christianity, in that such talk offended them as well as the king and queen of the fairies.

Between 1579 and 1651, 65 Sicilians, only eight of them men, were hauled before the Spanish Inquisition and charged with sorcery for consorting with the *doñas de fuera*. The Inquisition in Sicily was more lenient than it was in other countries, and torture and execution were not applied as often to those in its custody. Perhaps such leniency encouraged the accused to be forthcoming in their confessions but, in any case, many women freely admitted to being in the company of the *doñas de fuera* and magically transported to a faerie kingdom called Benevento, where they indulged in the licentious lifestyle of the fairies.

Despite their revelations that the fairies abhorred any talk about Christianity, the women did not feel they were doing anything wrong, nor could they be coerced into saying they were in the power of Satan. The Inquisition ruled that fairies did not exist but, realizing that many of the Sicilian people still believed in them, and holding them to be harmless and not satanic, dropped charges against most of the women, or inflicted only light punishment.

It can only be assumed the *doñas de fuera* continue in their revelries to this day in the mountains of Sicily. Sicily, as well as much of today's Spain and Portugal, was once part of an Islamic empire that lasted for several centuries. The Islamic, or Moorish, influence on the culture of these regions can still be found in architecture, design, science, cuisine, literature and fables. One legendary shapeshifting spirit from Islamic folk culture that still lives in popular belief is the jinn. The Quran tells of the creation of the jinn: 'And the jinn We [angels] created before from scorching fire' (15:27). Often considered to be led by Satan, the jinn can fly exceptionally fast and can reach the heavens, where they are able to listen to the conversations of

angels and bring those words back to prophets, seers and oracles, hence their association with magic and occultism. Although not a universal belief in Arabian countries, jinn are generally believed to have the ability to change their genders.

An interesting note in Arabian mythology is that there are springs, such as Al-Zarah, that will change a person's gender if he or she drinks from or bathes in its waters.

Shapeshifters have a long and rich history in Europe, and it is clear from folklore and popular stories of the region that they continue to live on in the hearts and minds of the people.

5

Fay, Faerie and Folk Shapeshifters around the World

A long time ago, Princess Rich Jewel, also known as Toyotma-hime, fell in love with a hunter named Hōri no Mikoto. Their love blossomed, even though she was the daughter of the Dragon King and Hōri was only human, although the great-grandson of the sun goddess, Amaterasu. They married, with her father's blessing, and Hōri lived with the princess in her father's undersea kingdom for three years before the longing for his home above the sea became too strong. When he left for the upper world, Princess Rich Jewel was pregnant. She delivered a son, who later sired four children, one of whom, Kamuyamato Iwarebiko, became Japan's first emperor. Thus the Japanese royal family claimed descent from both dragons and humans, as well as the sun goddess.

This tale from ancient Japan gave credence to the hereditary powers of the imperial Japanese emperors (until Emperor Hirohito's renunciation of them in 1946) by invoking the powers of the dragon, one of the most respected figures in both Japanese and Chinese cultures. The origin of a belief in dragons is obscure, although it most likely developed in China and pre-dates written history. Dragons figure importantly in Chinese folk traditions and Taoism and, by the ninth century, had become incorporated within Buddhist thought and iconography as a protector of both the person of Buddha and of Buddhist law. When Buddhism spread to Japan from China, the dragons went with it.

By that time, the dragon's reptilian form, by which it is known today throughout Asia, had been established. It was usually represented as having a long, scaly serpentine body with a dorsal fin, large bat-like wings, clawlike feet and a pointed tail. Its face had large eyes; bushy eyebrows; wide, flaring nostrils; sharp teeth and beard-like whiskers. Small horns protruded from its head.

Dragons were associated with water and the sky, their kingdoms and palaces often located below the sea. Not least among the dragon's many magical powers was its ability to shapeshift. Perhaps the most powerful of all Japanese *benge* – shapeshifters – the dragon can make itself invisible or can transform into any form it wishes, although it most often chooses to transform into human shape. In Japanese art, dragons are sometimes depicted with a pearl or ball under their chins. This is called the 'star ball', and it is theorized that the dragon reserves some of its energy in the ball when it shapeshifts; this theory is one of the few in shapeshifter lore that reference the energy required to make a transformation.

Unlike dragons in European folk traditions, Asian dragons, although fearsome and powerful, are not regarded as evil, maiden-abducting monsters that must be slain by a pure-of-heart knight. To be sure, there are some dragon shapeshifting stories from medieval France in which a benevolent dragon in the form of a man falls in love with a female human, or in at least one case, a dragoness falling in love with a man. Overall, however, European dragons do not act kindly, nor are they treated that way in return. But Asian dragons are regarded as wise and benevolent and bringers of wealth and good fortune. Being in a dragon's good graces can be rewarding in many ways to a human. This benevolent nature accounts for the many stories from Japanese and Chinese cultures, of dragons and their dragon-children taking human form to marry humans.

There are some legends of the gods battling evil dragons, but it was always understood that such beasts were *foreign* dragons. The local dragons were worthy of respect and, as symbols of authority, could be petitioned as one would petition a just and wise ruler.

There is one story from sixth-century Japan about a dragon who lived in a cave and devoured the children of the nearby village of

Koshigoe. To put a stop to this, the Buddhist goddess of the sea, Benzaiten, offered to marry the dragon. Once married, Benzaiten pointed out the evil in the dragon's transgressions against the villagers. Mortified and ashamed, the dragon transformed itself into a hill. While the dragon seems evil for eating children, it does have a conscience and is able finally to recognize its faults and punish itself for them, even if such punishment means it loses its dragon nature. The dragon demonstrates a much different character from that of a European dragon fighting to the death against the forces of good.

One cannot stress too strongly the importance of the dragons in Southeast Asian cultures. Dragons were painted on early Chinese tombs to ward off evil spirits. Dragon sculptural and architectural elements have long been incorporated in Buddhist and Shinto temples, and they have been favourite subjects of Asian artists. As symbols of power and authority, dragons have been used in royal seals and insignias and embroidered on robes of the ruling elite. Dragon dances during Chinese New Year celebrations honour the dragon and ask it to grant good fortune. In Vietnam and China, it is auspicious to have a child, especially a son, born in a Dragon Year, according to the Chinese calendar, since the dragon will bring that child wealth, power and good luck.

An interesting bit of shapeshifting lore concerning dragons comes from ancient China, where it was said only members of the royal family were allowed to eat loquat fruit because it had shapeshifting powers. Koi would eat loquat fruits that fell into rivers, and the fruit would give the fish the strength and desire to swim upstream and up waterfalls, where they would magically transform into dragons.

The shapeshifting nature of the dragon also makes it an important figure in Asian cultures, even today. After all, what man wouldn't want to meet and marry a beautiful woman, who then endows him with riches and power in addition to her own beauty?

There are three other important *benge* in Japanese culture: the *tengu*, *tanuki* and *kitsune*; the latter has already been discussed in Chapter One. The *tengu* is a bird-man goblin of Japan's mountain forests. As an avian-human hybrid, the *tengu* has wings and a long beak (in some representations, a crow-like beak), but it is also a

consummate shapeshifter, changing into any human or animal form it chooses. There are essentially two physical types of *tengu*. *Karasu tengu* has a human body with a bird's head. The *konoha tengu* also has a human physique, but it is winged and has a long, Pinocchio-like nose.

Among the *tengu*'s magical powers is the ability to transport itself instantly from place to place without using its wings, and the strange – and it would seem, pointless – skill of being able to talk to humans without moving its mouth. The *tengu* also possesses a more troubling power: the ability to insert itself uninvited into human dreams.

The origins of the *tengu* rose simultaneously in China, India and Japan, and *tengu* have both Shinto and Buddhist attributes. The *tengu* is an excellent martial arts fighter. It is a mischief-maker and prankster that abhors arrogance, vanity and boastfulness. The victims of its pranks are frequently vainglorious Buddhist priests or samurai, as well as those in power who abuse their authority for their own profit and gain.

Tengu were not always thought of as mere pranksters. In early folklore, they were perceived as enemies of Buddhism, setting fire to temples and harassing priests. They were also believed to abduct children. But over time, the nature of *tengu* evolved and, by the time of the Edo period (1603–1868), *tengu* were enlisted to find children, rather than abduct them, and they served as guardians of Buddhist temples, rather than destroyers. Sculpted *tengu* guardian figures can still be found on or around Japanese Buddhist buildings.

As shapeshifters, one of their favourite transformations is into the form of a *yamabushi*, a 'mountain ascetic', akin to a religious hermit. In that form, the *tengu* would wear the *yamabushi*'s distinctive cap and robe. But, even in that pious form, the *tengu* was still a prankster.

The Greek-Irish writer Lafcadio Hearn wrote about such a trickster in his 1890 book *In Ghostly Japan*. Hearn emigrated from Ireland to the United States in 1869, when he was nineteen years old, living first in Cincinnati, Ohio, and then in New Orleans, before relocating to Martinique. He lived there for two years. In 1890 Hearn moved to Japan, where he became a great interpreter to the Western world of



A 19th-century Japanese netsuke featuring two *tengu* carrying a parcel suspended from the long beak of one of them.

all things Japanese, married a Japanese woman and acquired Japanese citizenship under the name Yakumo Koizumi. His 'Story of a Tengu', from *In Ghostly Japan*, is a typical *tengu* shapeshifting tale.

Many years ago, in old Japan, 'in the days of the Emperor Go-Reizen', a holy priest out walking came across some boys beating with a stick a kite (the bird) that they had caught in a snare. Moved to compassion, the priest asked the boys why they were beating the poor bird. The boys replied that they wanted the bird's feathers. The devout priest traded his feathered fan for the bird. Seeing the bird was not too badly injured, the priest set it free and it flew away.

The priest continued his walk, happy to have performed a Buddhist act of merit. Not much further along the path, an odd-looking monk walked out from the bushes. He approached the priest and thanked him for saving his life. The priest protested that he had not saved the strange monk's life; he didn't even know him, to which the odd monk replied,

It is not wonderful that you cannot recognize me in this form. I am the kite that those cruel boys were tormenting at Kita-no-Oji. You saved my life; there is nothing in this world more precious than life. So, I now wish to return your kindness in some way or other. If there be anything that you would like to have, or to know, or to see, – anything that I can do for you, in short, – please tell me; for as I happen to possess, in a small degree, the Six Supernatural Powers, I am able to gratify almost any wish that you can express.

Astounded, the priest thought long and hard, but could come up with only one wish: to be present in long-ago India, in the time of the Buddha, when there was a great assembly of deities on the mountaintop of Gridhrakûta. The *tengu* said he could easily grant such a wish. He took the priest to a secluded place and told him to close his eyes until he heard the words of Lord Buddha teaching the law. The *tengu* warned the priest not to open his eyes until that moment, nor to speak or make any sound at all. The *tengu* then left the priest. All day long, the priest sat quietly with his eyes closed, waiting for the appearance of the Lord Buddha. Finally, as evening fell, he heard the voice of Buddha speaking as from the heavens.

The priest's eyes flew open, and there before him, displayed in all their glory, were the deities and spiritual beings. Flowers rained down from the sky, and sweet fragrances filled the air. Everywhere were countless gods, demons, nagas, goblins, dragons, disciples, bodhisattvas and holy men. And above all that, floating in mid-air, was the Lion-throne, upon which the Lord Buddha sat in all his majesty.

Then, forgetting utterly his pledge – foolishly dreaming that he stood in the very presence of the Buddha – he cast himself down in worship with tears of love and thanksgiving; crying out with a loud voice, 'O thou Blessed one!' At that moment, the ground shook, and the celestial vision instantly disappeared, leaving the priest alone in the darkness. The *tengu* came to the priest and berated him for his disobedience, which cost him his divine vision. He said to the priest,

Because you did not keep the promise which you made to me, and heedlessly allowed your feelings to overcome you, the Gohôtendo, who is the Guardian of the Doctrine, swooped down suddenly from heaven upon us, and smote us in great anger, crying out, 'How do ye dare thus to deceive a pious person?' Then the other monks, whom I had assembled, all fled in fear. As for myself, one of my wings has been broken so that now I cannot fly.²

With those words, the *tengu* vanished forever. In this story, we see the shapeshifting *tengu* in action, playing a prank on a priest who had been self-absorbed in congratulatory thoughts of the good deed he had done in rescuing the kite. During the priest's vision, he calls out to Buddha, as though he were worthy of addressing him, another error in vanity, which the *tengu* hates and punishes accordingly. Like many European shapeshifter stories, this one is also instructional, in this case designed to teach humility. A surprising twist to this tale, however, is that the *tengu* also suffers punishment in the form of a broken wing, for deceiving the priest. In Japan, *tengu* stories first appeared in documents dating from AD 720 but continued right up to modern times. An official document from the Edo government in 1860 asks the *tengu* temporarily to vacate a certain mountain where the Shogun planned to visit.

There are also many old stories told in Japan about the *tanuki*, or Japanese raccoon dog, a canine species that bears a close resemblance to the raccoon, with black stripes below the eyes. *Tanukis* are also sometimes mistaken for badgers or foxes. They can be almost 0.6 metres (2 ft) in length and, like raccoons, have adapted to humanity by moving into suburban and urban areas, where they thrive on rubbish, or by raiding gardens.

The real-life *tanukis* became shapeshifting supernatural entities in Japanese folklore as the fox lore of China – all about evil, shapeshifting foxes – was introduced into Japan between the fourth and seventh centuries. The Japanese replaced the fox with their native *tanuki*. This mythological *tanuki*, however, kept many of the traits of the fox shapeshifter. Originally the *tanuki* were malevolent

shapeshifters that transformed into human form, haunting and possessing people. As might be expected given such activities, simply seeing a *tanuki* was considered an evil omen.

An odd Japanese legend says *tanuki* could shapeshift into trains. In the nineteenth century, as rail lines were being built throughout Japan, people reported a rash of 'phantom train' sightings. There are ghost stories around the world about 'phantom trains' – one of the most famous, in the United States, being the appearance of Abraham Lincoln's funeral train – but the exact cause for Japanese 'phantom train' sightings is unclear, although it may have to do with the high number of train accidents in the early days of the railroad. In any case, because real-life *tanuki* carcasses were often found near the location where the sightings took place, people came to believe the *tanuki* had been in shapeshifted train form.

Another old story tells of a *tanuki* that kills an old woman and turns her into soup. It then takes the form of the old woman and feeds the soup to her husband. Other common forms of the shapeshifter *tanuki* were a witch, a monk or a one-eyed monster that could kill people with lightning. Over centuries, the *tanuki* gradually transformed in folktales to a more benign creature. Still a shapeshifter, it was more mischievous than evil. Its physical appearance altered to its now-characteristic form having a big belly, which it plays like a drum, and a huge scrotum. It also carries a bottle of sake. In older stories, the *tanuki* drummed out music on its big belly to entrance travellers and lead them off the path, but by the eighteenth century, belly-drumming seems more for entertainment than for any other reason. There is a story of a *tanuki* beating a tune on its belly every night for a human family in exchange for being allowed to sleep under their porch. In some stories, the *tanuki* is so enchanted by its own belly-music that it beats its belly bare and dies, or swells his belly so much that it bursts.

Perhaps the strangest attribute of the *tanuki* is its huge scrotum. Contrary to the obvious conclusion one might draw about the *tanuki*'s sexual prowess, its gross anatomical exaggeration is not about sex, but rather is considered a symbol of wealth and prosperity. One explanation for how that meaning became attached to the *tanuki*'s scrotum is that metalworkers in Japan formerly hammered gold into thin

sheets by first wrapping it in the skin of a real-life *tanuki*. By the nineteenth century, Japanese artists were having ribald fun in depicting *tanuki* with enormous scrotums using them in bizarre ways: as giant umbrellas in rainstorms, as fishing nets, as boats to ferry people across rivers, as wagons to pull heavy loads, as a kimono, and so on.

The contemporary image of the *tanuki* emerged in the twentieth century. Cuddly and cute, he became a big-bellied shapeshifter with a huge scrotum, and a goofy, befuddled expression. He wears a straw hat and carries with him a bottle of sake and a promissory note, which he never pays. The *tanuki* can be found everywhere in Japan, especially in Shigaraki, a centre for the manufacture of *tanuki* ceramic statues. *Tanuki* statues are regularly found outside bars, restaurants, train stations and shops. There is even an arts and crafts shop in Shigaraki in the shape of a reclining *tanuki*.

The *tanuki* is still considered a figure of good fortune and good luck. A large-scrotomed, dancing *tanuki* appears in a wacky 2005 Japanese television commercial for Anabuki Builders. The commercial begins with Little Red Riding Hood in the forest. She sings a song that says Anabuki Builders will make your 'dreams expand, your hopes expand, your breasts expand', at which point she is interrupted by the *tanuki* that jumps out of the woods, jiggling his expanded scrotum.

There is another category of shapeshifters that first appeared in Chinese culture and was then exported to Japan, along with Buddhism. These shapeshifters are neither inhuman creatures, nor are they animals. Rather, they are the spirits, ghosts of humans who, for various reasons, also become shapeshifters. In both cultures, the ghosts are malevolent and must be appeased; the annual Hungry Ghost Festival, held throughout Asia, in which families prepare elaborate offerings of food and material goods (in the form of paper effigies), is designed to appease the spirits and bring good luck to their families.

Japanese scholar and translator James S. De Benneville writes about such ghosts:

Either it has become an unworshipped spirit, or owing to some atrocious injury in life, stays to wander the Earth, and to



An 18th-century Japanese netsuke carved in the form of a *tanuki*.

secure vengeance on the living perpetrator. In most cases this is affected by the grudge felt or spoken as the last moment of life. The mind, concentrated in its hate and malice at this final crisis, secures to the Spirit a continued and unhappy sojourn among the living, until the vengeance is secured, the grudge satisfied, and the Spirit pacified.³

There are many types of shapeshifting ghosts in Chinese and Japanese folklore. The Śūrangama Sūtra, a Buddhist text that originated in China in AD 732, defines some of these ghosts. The *yāogui*, or weird ghosts, in life were extremely materialistic and, as ghosts, can transform into any physical object. The *mèiguī*, trickster ghosts, who sowed confusion while alive, transform into animals. The *gūdú-guī*, venomous ghosts, were hateful to others while they lived and shapeshift into insects. The *yāngui*, or nightmare ghosts, defrauded people and shapeshift into pure darkness, while blinding light may be the shapeshifted form of a *yishī-guī*, a servant ghost, who was

corrupted by its desire for accomplishment in life. The *chuánsòng-guī*, or messenger ghosts, were litigious in life and can shapeshift into any person.

The Japanese words *obake* and *bakemono* have confusedly been used interchangeably to mean 'a thing that changes', as in transformation through shapeshifting. While *obake* may refer to the shapeshifting ghost of a human being, *bakemono* is the term generally applied to non-human shapeshifters whose true form may be a fox (*kitsune*), a badger (*mujina*), a cat (*bakeneko*) or a *tanuki*. They may also be shapeshifting plants, *kodama*, or household objects, *tsukumogami*.

Whether called *obake* or *bakemono*, one does not wish to cross paths with these malevolent shapeshifting monsters. If not transforming itself into human form, a *bakemono* may choose to shapeshift into something far more terrifying. Imagine being confronted by a *hitotsume-kozō*, a bald boy with one cyclopean eye in the middle of his forehead, or a *noppera-bō*, which first appears as a human being familiar to its victim before shapeshifting by dissolving all the features of its face until there is nothing left but a smooth, featureless 'face'. And what does one do when the path is blocked by an *ōnyūdō*, literally 'big monk', who may be twice as tall as a man, or perhaps taller than a mountain? The word 'run' comes to mind.

Lafcadio Hearn's story 'A Passional Karma', from his book *In Ghostly Japan*, tells the tale of a shapeshifting *obake* in love with a samurai. When the lady O-Tsuyu and the samurai Shinzaburō meet for the first time they fall instantly in love, but they are kept apart by others who think the match unwise. O-Tsuyu pines for the samurai and finally dies of a broken heart, followed in death a few days later by her loyal servant, O-Yoné.

Some time passes and then, one night, Shinzaburō sees O-Tsuyu and her servant walking by his house! He rushes out to meet them and is shocked to hear O-Yoné tell him the ladies thought he was dead. He replies he had been told *they* were dead. Of course, he does not realize the women *are* dead and are now *obake*, so he invites them into his house. They return to visit him for several nights.

The samurai's servant, Tomozō, is suspicious of the mysterious ladies visiting his master and is afraid they are after his money, so he

spies on them through a chink in the wall to try to determine the lady's identity. Listening to the lovers through the wall, he can tell by her language that she is not a common tramp, but a lady of prestige. He presses his eye to the wall and

At last he was able to see; – but therewith an icy trembling seized him; and the hair of his head stood up.

For the face was the face of a woman long dead, – and the fingers caressing were fingers of naked bone, – and of the body below the waist there was not anything: it melted off into thinnest trailing shadow. Where the eyes of the lover deluded saw youth and grace and beauty, there appeared to the eyes of the watcher horror only, and the emptiness of death.

The story ends in traditional Japanese karmic fashion with the death of Shinzaburō and his burial beside his shapeshifting ghostly lover.

As Japanese immigrated to Hawaii, they brought their shapeshifting *obake* stories with them. There they have found a place among similar shapeshifter stories of the native Hawaiians. It is not uncommon for shapeshifter lore to move from one culture to another, as in the case of Hawaiians borrowing from the Japanese, who borrowed from the Chinese, who, for many of their shapeshifter stories, were indebted to stories from India that came to them along with Buddhism. But in addition to such cultural appropriation, there is something universally appealing in the shapeshifter character that is responsible for creating shapeshifting lore in cultures all around the globe. There are variants, of course, in the type of shapeshifter found in one culture as opposed to another, those variants being rooted in religious, geographic and environmental differences.

For example, indigenous cultures living close to the earth, surrounded by both the beauty and dangers of the natural world, often represent their shapeshifters as creatures of this natural world, rather than as imaginary entities, such as the fey folk of Europe – but not always entirely natural.

A fantastic menagerie of monsters can be found in aborigine 'dreamtime' stories, which should come as no surprise, considering

Australia's vast wilderness in which strange creatures are said to exist. Many of these creatures are shapeshifters.

In Australia's Western Desert, an unlucky person may come across the path of a *Mamu*, a cannibalistic humanoid that typically lives underground or in hollowed-out trees. The *Mamu* may be bald, or it may have long hair that stands straight up from its head. It has a hairy body, bulbous eyes and sharp, pointed teeth capable of stripping off the flesh of its victims. It may appear human-like, or it may transform into a sharp-beaked bird, a dog or even a falling star. As in some European legends, Aborigine parents may use threats of being attacked and eaten by a *Mamu* to control the behaviour of their children.

Like so many other cultures, the Aborigines also have a shape-shifting water spirit in their pantheon of monsters. *Yawlk yawlk* are murderous fish-tailed women with long, flowing hair made of green algae that lurk in rivers and deep waterholes. As shapeshifters, they take on a human female form and entice unwise men to their watery death by drowning. Children and young people especially fear the *yawlk yawlk*, since the creatures can easily grab them and drag them under the water. Here, too, is a cautionary tale for children to stay close to home, rather than wander near dangerous bodies of water.

New Zealand's Maori people also have a shapeshifting water-being that figures in many of their own and Polynesian legends. The *taniwha* lives in the ocean, as well as in rivers, lakes or watery caves. This people-eating monster looks like a shark, dragon or whale, but it can shapeshift into any of those animals. This monster eats people. In some stories, the *taniwha* is regarded as a personal or tribal guardian, but it still poses a danger to outsiders.

The Ashanti people of Ghana have stories of a giant batlike creature called the *sassabonsam*. The creature has the head of a fox and, oddly, iron teeth and iron hooks on its feet and wings that it uses to carry off humans. The *sassabonsam* is a shapeshifter, its 'human' form that of a tall, skinny bloodsucking man, with a beard and red eyes, whose feet point both forwards and backwards. Also in Ghana, the Ewe people fear a shapeshifter called the *adze*, whose natural form is like the *sassabonsam*. The *adze* shapeshifts into what appears to be a

harmless firefly. This firefly, however, spreads diseases, likes to suck the blood of children, and turns its victims into witches; it is a thoroughly nasty little insect.

The normal form of the *tikoloshe* of South Africa is that of an imaginary water spirit, an evil dwarfish sprite. Zulu stories tell of the *tikoloshe* becoming invisible when it drinks water, or transforming into a bearlike humanoid. Elsewhere, the *ilimu* in Kenya appears as any number of animals but transforms into a man-eating human, a shapeshifting cannibal. Chapter Two also recounts some shapeshifter stories from Nigeria.

A creature similar in nature to Japanese ghost shapeshifters can be found throughout South America lurking on the fringes between civilization and the wilderness. Mostly known as *La Patasola*, this female shapeshifter is also known as *La Sayona* in Venezuela, or *La Tunda* in Colombia. No matter what she may be called, *La Patasola* is a hideous, murderous monster.

Her origins are unclear. Some legends say she was an adulteress having an affair with her employer. Her husband killed both and chopped off her leg. Now, as a ghost, she is damned to haunt the wilderness. Another version says that *La Patasola* murdered her own son and was punished by having her leg cut off and being banished to the jungle.

La Patasola haunts the wild, remote mountains and jungles of South America, where she is charged with protecting the land and its animals, especially from the predations of mining and logging companies that are destroying the environment, or hunters, herders and shepherds. Despite her single leg, she can move through the jungle with incredible speed. Transforming herself into the form of a beautiful woman, often in the guise of a male worker's beloved, she will lure her hapless victim deep into the jungle, where she will revert to her true, horrific nature; tangled, matted hair, one breast, bulbous eyes, a hooked nose and thick lips. Her victim will have only seconds before her long, sharp canine teeth puncture his flesh and suck out his blood, leaving him a dried-out husk.

Among America's Eastern Woodlands and Central Plains nations – primarily the Potawatomi, Creek, Omaha and Ponca – the story of

Deer Woman is well known. Associated with love and fertility, Deer Woman is generally considered a benign spirit, but she also has a dark side. She could become a seductress, preying on promiscuous or adulterous men, leading them away or trampling them to death in her deer form. This behaviour may be the result of how she became Deer Woman in the first place. One tale says she was originally a woman who was raped and turned into a deer (there are strong parallels here with ancient Greek shapeshifter myths). Another says she was a woman who was murdered and brought back to life by the original Deer Woman, although the legend is not clear where *that* original spirit came from.

Like some European shapeshifter tales, *La Patasola* and Deer Woman stories are cautionary in nature. They say a licentious, lewd woman may end up as a damned, deformed ghost, and lustful men who engage in promiscuity or adultery may end up dead. The stories may also be a warning to people to avoid desolate and wild areas where civilization ends.

But these shapeshifters are also seen as protectors of the environment, as are the *chindi* among the Diné (Navajo) people of America's southwest. The *chindi* can transform into any animal and are particularly vengeful on people who harm Earth Mother's creatures. A sure sign of a *chindi* is any animal walking on two hind legs. Relentless in its pursuit of those it sees as an enemy, there is little escape from a *chindi*.

The Gullah people – descendants of African slaves from various parts of West Africa – who live in the Georgia and South Carolina Lowcountry in America, and have developed a creole language in use since the 1700s, tell of a terrifying shapeshifter called the boo hag. The boo hag is an undead spirit that, by day, goes about wearing the skin of one of its victims, passing itself off as a living person. But at night, it sheds its skin, becoming bright red in colour, with visible blue veins, and goes hunting for sustenance. The boo hag will enter a home through an open window, or even through cracks, crevices or holes, seeking its victim. It will climb on the chest of its sleeping victim and, vampire-like, suck in the victim's breath all night long, 'riding him', thereby stealing the victim's energy. If the

victim remains unaware of the attack, he will awaken in the morning feeling exhausted and listless. Should he waken as the boo hag rides him, the creature will steal his skin, leaving him to suffer. The boo hag needs to return to its former skin, or abscond with a new skin before dawn, lest it be destroyed in the morning light. A common way of saying 'goodnight' among the Gullah people is to say, 'Don't let the boo hag ride you.'

People living along the Amazon River in Brazil are aware of the dangers in the jungle and avoid the riverbank, especially at night. While there are certainly wild animals enough to put them in danger, jungle residents most fear the *encantando*, the 'enchanted one'. Brazil's *encantandos* are monsters that live deep beneath the waters of the Amazon, appearing in the form of snakes or dolphins. Drawn to human society, especially when they hear the music of festivals, an *encantando* will transform into a seductive human of irresistible beauty and great musical talent. Bewitched by the beauty of the *encantando*, the villager is easy prey. He is kidnapped, dragged off to the monster's watery lair and is never seen again.

A similar story is told among the Carib people in Guyana, in which the daughters of the Anaconda, the chief water spirit, are shapeshifters. They transform into beautiful women to lure unlucky fishermen to their deaths. Some of their victims are deemed worthier than others, and their lives are spared, although they are then enslaved by the water spirits.

There are many traditions around the world in which the call of an owl at night means impending death for someone. In Mexico, *la chusa*, often translated as 'witch-bird', is a witch in the form of an owl with huge wings and the head of a disfigured old woman. The beating of her large wings against a windowpane or the side of a house indicates death is imminent for someone in the house; *la chusa's* role is to take the person's soul away. The creature is a shapeshifter. If it can be captured and held until sunrise, the beast will transform into a beautiful woman. *La chusa* is similar to the stories of Portugal's *mouras encantadas* in that what appears to be a spell or enchantment may be broken, freeing a beautiful woman. However, in some parts of Mexico, the people believe that if they can capture the bird with

green vines and hold it overnight, it will transform back into its witch form, only then to be burned at the stake.

The Seminole people of Florida tell of a similar shapeshifter called the *stikini*. They were evil witches who, during the day, appeared as ordinary Seminole but at night vomited up their internal organs and souls to become owl-beings that fed on human hearts. So terrifying were these creatures that to even speak of them could turn one into a *stikini*; their stories were told only by medicine men who could protect themselves from the evil monsters. As has been seen in so many shapeshifter tales from around the world, these stories were sometimes used to ensure good behaviour from children. In the American southwest, the Apache know of a shapeshifter they call Big Owl Man. Often used as a 'bogeyman' to scare children, Big Owl Man is a giant who appeared in human form as a man-eating ogre, or could assume the form of a giant horned owl big enough to carry off a child.

Another weird shapeshifting 'bird' is the *chonchon*, found in shapeshifter tales from Chile and Argentina. In both countries, the *chonchon* is said to be a sorcerer who, with the use of a magical cream rubbed on his throat, can safely remove his head. The head sprouts extremely large ears, which it uses to fly, as well as feathers and talons. Although its birdlike cry can be heard by anyone as it flies on moonless nights, the *chonchon* is visible only to other sorcerers. Considered a harbinger of bad luck, the *chonchon* form allows the evil sorcerer to work his bad deeds, such as sucking the blood from sleeping humans.

The Iroquois of North America also tell tales of terrifying flying heads. Known as *kanontsistonties*, their origin stories vary and it is not clear if they were shapeshifters. One common explanation for them is that they were the spirits of people who practised cannibalism and were damned to feed on humans in their transformed, hideous guise.

Interesting relatives of the *chonchon* and *kanontsistonties* are putti, found in European art. The putti, sometimes identified as cherubs, are winged figures of chubby little babies, frequently appearing in mythological and religious paintings and sculpture. In sculptural form particularly, putti are often presented as bodiless, winged heads, although unlike the other types of flying heads, they are pure of heart and good in nature.

All these shapeshifters have been animals or shamans that transform into some other being, or imaginary spirits that are said to have the power of transformation. But there is also another form of shapeshifting still practised around the world, and that is internal shapeshifting during rituals or ceremonies. An internal shapeshifter does not physically change its form, but shifts its consciousness to take on the persona of another person or animal.

A good example of this type of shapeshifting concerns the funeral rites of the Chachi people, also known as the Cayapas, of north-western Ecuador. The Chachi have a highly developed cosmology that includes an afterlife much like the earthly life they leave behind after death. In this afterlife, the dead find familiar people, animals, plants, food and so on. However, the deceased can only find their way to the afterlife if the proper funerary rites are enacted on their behalf and, as these rites are complicated and last for several days, the rituals must be followed precisely and free from error.

An unusual part of the Chachi funerary ritual involves a 'game' played by members of the tribe, in which mourners pretend to be other people, animals or even plants that the deceased will encounter in the afterlife. But it's not precisely a game, nor are the participants pretending in their roles.

The anthropologist Istvan Praet describes this part of the Chachi funerary ritual:

Moreover, game participants 'take on' the bodies of animals such as cows, chickens, jaguars, horses, fish, macaws, dogs, or white-lipped peccaries, and of plants such as the royal palm or manioc. They also take on the bodies of humans invested with a range of social functions: policemen, fishermen, hunters or harvesters. The only way to account for these disparate embodiments is to analyze them as many manifestations of beings from the world of the dead, or, in other words, 'ghosts.' Game participants become 'something-else-than-Chachi,' or 'extra-human.' Understood as such, the wake and its concomitant 'games' become a vast shape-shifting operation. Participants in the funerary ritual are not exactly 'players.'⁴

Death is certainly a metamorphosis, no matter how one defines the word, but that metamorphosis is of crucial importance to the Chachi. The deceased will hopefully pass into the afterlife if rituals are performed correctly, but to fail in that regard could sentence the deceased to a 'death-in-life' as a ghost. Praet writes,

Death, in my interpretation, is primarily an event of metamorphosis. One casts off one's human shape and assumes the shape of a ghost. The gifts of food, clothes, and money in the coffin indicate ghosts – from a ghost's point of view – continue to live in a human world, albeit one that cannot be perceived as such by living human beings. To avoid trouble, it is of the utmost importance that the metamorphosis be as complete and thorough as possible.⁵

Another example of internal shapeshifting can be found among the Carib tribes of the Caribbean islands – the indigenous people whom Christopher Columbus 'discovered' in 1492. They believe in an evil spirit called a *kanaima*. In some ways similar to the Christian belief in demonic possession, the *kanaima* could enter a person and possess him, filling him with furious anger, or even transforming him into a raging animal. It would seem any Carib tribesman would do his utmost to avoid such a being, but in fact, through magical rituals or the ingestion of drugs, some invited the *kanaima* to possess them, so they could take revenge for a slain relative.

As fantastic as some of these shapeshifters may seem to the contemporary mind, it is important to note that there are many cultures – and not only indigenous cultures – that retain a belief in shapeshifters and the power of transformation. That belief may manifest in magical shamanism, in which the shaman does, indeed, appear to transform himself into something 'other'. In South America, Argentine shamans transform into jaguars using the hide of the great cat and by speaking magical incantations. Known as *tigre capiango*, the motive for these transformations is simply to gain more physical and magical power. But perhaps more often than going through physical changes, shapeshifting can be an internal transformation,

a psychological and conscious shifting into the 'other' that is as old as the prehistoric hunters who left pictures of themselves 'transformed' on the walls of caves, or the berserkers, fearful killing machines, who attributed their brutality to the animal natures they took on. Internal shapeshifters do exist. They exist among the Chachi and Carib, they exist among practitioners of voodoo, they exist among Hopi *kachina* dancers, and they may even exist in the Catholic rites of exorcism. Simply stated, shapeshifting is not an extinct superstition. It resonates with us today.

6

The Werewolf

An old Cherokee man was teaching his grandson about life. As the embers from their campfire floated up into the night sky, the old man said,

'Grandson, there is a fight going on inside me. It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One wolf is evil. He is anger, envy, sorrow, resentment, and regret. He is greed, arrogance, self-pity, and ego. The other is good. He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, and kindness. He is empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. This same fight is going on inside you, and in every other person, too.'

The grandson thought about it for a minute, and then asked, 'Which wolf will win?'

The old man simply replied, 'The one you feed.'

This traditional Cherokee tale, whose origins are unknown, speaks of the dual nature of man – primal and impulsive, while simultaneously rational and logical. That dual nature has long been a focus of inquiry for philosophers, theologians, artists and writers, all of them exploring the checks and balances that keep us centred and speculating on what happens when that primal, animal nature becomes dominant.

The werewolf is probably the most well-known shapeshifter and is the quintessential example of what can go wrong when that animal nature takes control. Its popularity and attraction may say something

about our own latent desires to be free of the shackles of morality and social mores and to run naked through the night-time woods, howling at the Moon. At the very least, the popularity of the werewolf in folktales, movies and books is a testament to our fascination with the forbidden, animal side of our nature.

Man's association with the wolf is ancient. On one hand, the wolf was a fearsome predator to hunter-gatherer societies, a powerful and cunning animal requiring constant vigilance on the part of humans, lest one be eaten by a wolf. On the other hand, our forebears tamed one strain of wolves, now-extinct breeding dogs that became mankind's first domesticated animal and, some might say, mankind's first animal friend. Yet the ferocious, feral wolf continued to stalk the forests, dangerous carnivores hunting solo or in packs and often hunting humans.

In the 1760s, villagers in the remote, mountainous region of Gévaudan in southern France suffered attacks from a huge, wolflike beast. Beginning on 15 January 1765, with the horrible death and mutilation of a young girl, and ending in 1767 with the killing of the 'Beast of Gévaudan', as it became known, the creature savagely slaughtered at least a hundred people, mostly women and children, in a wave of terror that was called the 'time of the death'. According to eyewitnesses, the Beast was hairy, black or reddish-brown in colour, with sharp teeth, a powerful tail and an unpleasant odour. It could run at great speed and leap to incredible heights. The Beast showed no fear of humans and attacked individuals or groups with equal ferocity, literally tearing its victims limb from limb with its sharp claws, disembowelling them with its razor-sharp teeth.

The people of Gévaudan lived in constant terror, as the Beast wandered from village to village; entire villages would empty out when the Beast was reported to be in the vicinity. The situation became so dire that King Louis xv dispatched a detachment of dragoons to the area to hunt down the Beast. They were unsuccessful, but the king also sent a huntsman named François Antoine to kill the Beast. On 21 September 1765 Antoine shot and killed a large grey wolf weighing 60 kilograms (132 lb). He stuffed the animal and sent it to the king, who displayed it in the palace at Versailles. Unfortunately,

the stuffed wolf was not the Beast. Two months later, the horrific killings resumed.

In 1767 the Beast was finally tracked down and killed by Jean Chastel, a local hunter. Chastel's own testimony states that he shot the Beast using silver bullets blessed by a priest, a traditional way of killing a werewolf.

So what was the Beast of Gévaudan? Some theorize that the creature was a hybrid animal, perhaps the offspring of a wolf and lion, or wolf and hyena. Some say it might have been a leopard. Some of the villagers in Catholic France believed the Beast to be the Devil incarnate. But others were certain the Beast was a werewolf. They cited eyewitness accounts of the Beast standing and running on two legs. Chastel described the dead Beast as having 'peculiar' feet, coarse, dark hair, and pointed ears. The members of the hunting party that accompanied him all described the Beast as half-man and half-wolf, a true werewolf. Werewolf or not, the Beast's grisly legacy lives on in Gévaudan, where there are several monuments to the Beast, and in the village of Saugues, home to an entire museum devoted to the Beast and its three-year reign of terror.

It may seem strange to us to think that entire populations would be convinced a werewolf stalked them, but shapeshifters of all kinds seemed real in the eighteenth century, just as they had for centuries before. Why wouldn't werewolves seem real when there was a long history of people who readily confessed to being one?

The traditional werewolf, or lycanthrope, is a person who changes into a wolf at the full moon. In Greek mythology, Lycaon is transformed into a wolf as a punishment, meted out by Zeus for the man's cannibalism, but in the Middle Ages, when werewolf tales were abundant, most of the transformations occurred spontaneously. Many of the tales speak of werewolves simply as supernatural beings, rather than people transformed against their will by higher powers. Sometimes the assumption is made that a werewolf transformation is the result of a curse, although the nature of the curse and its origin are not often clear.

In any case, the idea of lycanthropy has been around for a long time. It was known to the ancient Romans as *versipellis*, that is, 'skin

changer', or 'turn skin'. Paulus Aegineta, a seventh-century Byzantine Greek physician, wrote in his *Medical Compendium in Seven Books* that lycanthropy was neither self-induced nor a welcome change to the sufferer but was, in fact, a mental disease caused by brain malfunction, humoral pathology and hallucinogenic drugs.

Lycanthropy is a rare psychosis in which the patient has delusions of being a wild animal, usually a wolf. The psychiatrist Rajeet Shrestha describes the symptoms and behaviour of a patient suffering from lycanthropy – in this case, a twenty-year-old man:

Over the next few days, the patient displayed increasingly psychotic, animal-like behaviors – he howled loudly in his room; he broke into a run abruptly in the hallway; at times, he crawled on the floor on all four limbs. He also appeared to be internally stimulated; his affect changed without any apparent external triggers; sometimes, he smiled to himself, and, at other times, he scowled with an intense look on his face. When asked about these abnormal behaviors, he gave evasive responses. Eventually, he revealed that he believed he was a werewolf and that he periodically transformed into a wolf. He said that he started believing that he was a special person after he had visions of 'the Devil' several years ago. He also reported hearing 'random' voices. His family later reported that he had recently been preoccupied with books and movies involving werewolves.¹

This young man's case was more benign than some other cases of lycanthropy, and he did respond positively to drug therapy and psychotherapy. But other lycanthropes have not been as fortunate.

One night in sixteenth-century France, Pierre Burgot was frantically searching for his sheep, lost in a storm, when three men in black appeared and demanded that he renounce God. If he did, they promised him riches and the return of his lost sheep. He did so and shortly after met Michel Verdun, a shapeshifting werewolf. Verdun initiated Burgot into witchcraft. Stripping naked and covering their bodies with a 'magic' salve to become werewolves, the men engaged



German woodcut from the 17th century showing a werewolf attacking villagers.

in a series of murders throughout the French countryside. At their trial in 1521, the men admitted to their offences, which included eating a nine-year-old girl whose neck they had broken. The men were burned at the stake for their crimes.

Another gruesome case of lycanthropy also comes from France, where, in 1572, Gilles Garnier, in four separate attacks, killed two young girls and two young boys, tearing at their corpses with his hands – which he said were like paws to him – and his teeth,

mutilating the bodies and ripping the leg of one of the boys from the torso. Arrested, he freely confessed to the murders and to eating the flesh of his victims. He was apprehended before he could eat his last victim; the court was astounded that he would venture to eat the flesh on a Friday – traditionally, a day of abstaining from eating meat, according to the Catholic Church. Garnier was found guilty of 'werewolfery' and burned at the stake.

In 1589 Peter Stübbe, or Peter Stump, of Bedburg, Germany, was convicted of killing many people, among them thirteen young children, and two pregnant women, tearing the fetuses from their bodies and eating them. He claimed that a wolf-girdle given to him by the Devil allowed him to transform into a ravaging wolf. Documents from that time state that Stübbe, in wolf form, attacked two men and a woman, killing the men and mutilating their corpses; he then raped the woman, killed her and ate her. He was discovered in wolf form and pursued by dogs and men, who witnessed him shapeshifting back to his human form. Found guilty, along with his mistress and daughter – with both of whom he had a sexual relationship – he died a torturous death, broken upon the wheel.

In 1598 in France, Pernette Gandillon, a young girl from the Jura region, began going about on all fours, believing she was a wolf. She attacked two children, ripping out the throat of one of them, and was herself attacked and killed by a frenzied mob of vigilantes. Pernette's brother, Pierre, was charged with witchcraft, accused of being a werewolf and of turning his sister into one as well using a magical salve. Pierre admitted these actions at his trial, as did his son, Georges, who also said he used the salve to shapeshift into a werewolf. The pair confessed to killing and eating several children as werewolves. Not to be outdone by the rest of her family, Pierre's daughter, Antoinette, also admitted attending the same witches' sabbath as her father and brother and said she had sold her soul to the Devil, who appeared to her in the form of a black goat. While in prison, Pierre and Georges ran about on all fours, howling and snarling like wolves. The court put an end to this vicious canine family by burning all three at the stake.

That same year, yet another Frenchman became a lycanthrope. In a remote and wild spot near Caude, a provost's archer and a band

of rustics came upon the nude, horribly torn and mutilated body of a fifteen-year-old boy. Montague Summers, in his book *The Werewolf*, describes the scene:

The limbs, drenched in blood, were yet warm and palpitating, and as the companions approached two wolves were seen to bound away into the boscage [the forest]. Being armed and a goodly number to boot, the men gave chase, and to their amaze [*sic*] came upon a fearful figure, a tall gaunt creature of human aspect with long matted hair and beard, half-clothed in filthy rags, his hands dyed in fresh blood, his long nails clotted with garbage of red human flesh.²

This loathsome creature was a beggar named Jacques Roulet, who, along with his mendicant brother Jean and cousin Julien, roamed the countryside seeking handouts. Jacques told the authorities that his parents had promised him to the Devil when he was a child and that he could shapeshift into a wolf by applying to his body an ointment they had given him. Roulet confessed to attending witches' sabbaths and to murdering and devouring many children throughout the area. He gave the authorities detailed information about one murder, which conclusively proved his guilt. Although condemned to death, the Parliament of Paris, deeming Roulet insane, commuted his sentence to imprisonment in the hospital of St Germain.

One final story yet again comes from France: A teenager named Jean Grenier revealed to a girl he hoped to impress that he was a werewolf, a member of a coven of nine werewolves that hunted at the waning of the Moon on Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays. He told her he had killed and eaten dogs but that he much preferred the flesh of children. Reported to the authorities, Grenier was arrested on 2 June 1603, freely admitting to his werewolfery before the Higher Court.

Grenier told the court he had become a werewolf when a mysterious man clad all in black and astride a black charger gave him a wolfskin to wear, which would change him into a wolf. He called the man the Lord of the Forest, but it was clear Grenier thought him to be the Devil. Grenier then proceeded to enumerate his crimes to

the court, beginning with the murder and devouring of a three-year-old girl named Guyonne. Several witnesses came forth to give their accounts of attacks and killings by a wolf, the accounts matching the details Grenier related; there were many. Summers writes,

It would be superfluous and even wearisome to chronicle the cases, one after another, in which the parents of children who had been attacked by the wolf, boys and girls wounded and in many cases killed, came forward and exactly corroborated the confession of Jean Grenier.³

The Higher Court convicted Grenier of werewolfery, but because of his youth and 'extreme ignorance' he was locked up in the Franciscan friary of St Michael the Archangel in Bordeaux, with the warning that any attempt to escape would mean the gallows for him. Visitors to the boy reported him as gaunt, with deep-set black eyes that blazed fiercely. He had long, sharp teeth, some white, others black and broken, and his hands were like claws with horrid, crooked nails. He loved to hear stories about wolves and often walked on all fours with great agility. Grenier died at the friary in 1611.

Most of these French werewolf accounts come to us from *Discours de Sorciers*, written by Henri Boguet of Saint-Claude, who was Supreme Judge in Burgundy and the magistrate presiding over many witchcraft and werewolfery trials in the seventeenth century. Specifically, the werewolf tales can be found in the chapter 'Metamorphosis of Men into Beasts, and Especially of Lycanthropes or Loups-garoux'; *loup-garou* is the French word for werewolf. As extensive as Bouguet's work is, it is only a partial record of the many European werewolf stories of that time.

It is no surprise that these cases occurred in sixteenth-century Europe, since that time was the height of the witch hysteria, resulting in many trials and executions throughout Europe. There was little distinction in those days between witch and werewolf, and witches were thought to be able to shapeshift into werewolves. But there were also instances of lycanthropy that occurred centuries after the 1500s, such as the case of Manuel Blanco Romasanta, a self-proclaimed

werewolf and Spain's first serial killer. In 1844, suspected of killing the constable of León, Romasanta fled the country and reinvented himself as a tour guide in Portugal. Several women who had hired him disappeared. When arrested, he said he had been cursed into becoming a werewolf and would go on five-day killing sprees in wolf form. The court took his claim seriously and asked him to prove it by shifting into a wolf before their eyes, but Romasanta said he had been cursed for thirteen years and the curse had just expired the week before. He was spared execution because a doctor wanted to study his case, but he died in prison before that could happen.

Much more recently, in 2013, a California resident named Mark Andrews used a rifle to kill his neighbour, who Andrews believed was a vampire trying to steal his dreams. Andrews pleaded insanity at his trial, stating that he was a werewolf who had first transformed into wolf form at the age of three, that he had lived through medieval times and that he was married to a she-wolf. In 2015 Andrews was convicted of murder and sentenced to fifty years in prison.

A diabolical element may be noted in most of these stories, indicating a shift in how the werewolf was perceived. To ancient hunter-gatherers, taking on the form of a wolf or other animal was powerful shamanic magic, a valuable skill – if one could call it that – that would mean success in the hunt and thus survival of the tribe. Later warrior societies, such as the berserkers, also sought and welcomed transformations into wolves or bears to ensure victory in battle. There were even positive associations of werewolves with members of the nobility, as seen in the tale of Vseslav, prince of what is today Belarus.

Prince Vseslav Charodey ('the Sorcerer') was born in 1039 in Polotsk. According to the *Primary Chronicle*, also known as *Tale of Past Years*, a twelfth-century history of Kievan Rus, Vseslav's nickname derives from the fact that he was born with a caul, the amniotic sac, over his head, which is a traditional folkloric sign of supernatural abilities. He became prince of Polotsk upon his father's death in 1044 and found himself at odds with the Yaroslav family, rulers of Kievan Rus. During his 57-year reign, he oversaw the construction of the Cathedral of Holy Wisdom (Sophia) in Polotsk, which still stands

today, but he was also believed to have knowledge of sorcery. In an attack on Kievan Rus in the winter of 1066–7, he pillaged and burnt the city of Novgorod, removing the bell and other religious items from that city's Cathedral of Holy Wisdom and installing them in his own cathedral in Polotsk. And he was said to have accomplished that as a werewolf.

In the anonymous twelfth-century epic *The Tale of Igor's Campaigns*, Vseslav is often described as a werewolf. One section from the epic reads,

He with wiles at the last tore himself free: and galloped to the city of Kíev; with his weapon took hold of the golden throne of Kíev; galloped from them like a wild beast at mid-night from Bélgorod, swathed himself in a blue mist, rent asunder his bonds into three parts, opened wide the gates of Nóvgorod, shattered the Glory of Jaroslav; galloped like a wolf from Dudútki to the Nemíga.

Another line states, 'Prince Vseslav raced like a wolf across the path of the great Khors.' It was also said that, while in Kiev, Vseslav could hear the bells ringing all the way from his church in Polotsk, an impossible auditory feat unless one was blessed with the super-hearing of a werewolf.

An interesting component of this story is that the werewolf is not some commoner but is a member of the nobility, a powerful prince. In pre-Reformation Europe, Catholicism reigned supreme, with kings and queens usually paying allegiance to the popes, rather than risking their wrath in the form of excommunication and condemnation by God. The intimate workings between the papacy and secular powers is illustrated in the 1077 story of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV standing in the snow for three days outside the castle of Pope Gregory VII, begging the pope to lift the excommunication he had imposed on the emperor for Henry's usurping the pope's authority to appoint bishops and other clerics. But for the most part, ruling nobility were considered to rule by 'divine right' and were obeyed by their subjects as though these absolute monarchs were gods.



Veslav, prince of what is today Belarus, was said to go on his nightly raids in the guise of a werewolf.

This treatment of absolute monarchs as godlike led to stories in which werewolves were defeated by nobles. In the twelfth century, Marie de France translated twelve lays from the Breton language. One of the most popular is 'Bisclavret', a werewolf story. In the story, Bisclavret was a beloved baron in the king's court in Brittany. Each week, he would mysteriously disappear for three days. No one knew where he went, not even his wife. She repeatedly begs him to tell her where he goes, and he finally confesses he is a werewolf. He further tells her that he slips out of his clothes in the woods but must return

and put the clothes back on or be stuck in his wolf form. Shocked and repulsed by his confession, the wife conspires with a knight who has been in love with her to follow Bisclavret and steal his clothes. The knight does so, and poor Bisclavret is stuck in wolf form. His subjects assume he has died, and his wife marries the knight.

A year later, while the king and his men are out hunting, they corner a wolf that falls to its knees before the king, kisses his horse's stirrup and begs for mercy. Impressed by the wolf's gentle nature and humility, the king takes the wolf back to his court. At court, Bisclavret, as this wolf, sees the knight that stole his clothes and attacks him. The king beats him back with his staff but is concerned about the wolf's unusual behaviour and thinks the knight may have wronged the wolf in some way. The king visits the lands once owned by Bisclavret and takes the wolf with him. When the wolf sees his former wife bringing gifts to the king, he attacks her, tearing off her nose.

The king learns the woman is the wife of the knight the wolf attacked previously and is also the former wife of his beloved baron, Bisclavret. Suspicious, the king orders the woman tortured, and she confesses her story to him. The wolf and Bisclavret's clothes are brought to a private chamber and, moments later, a fully human Baron Bisclavret emerges from the chamber to the joyous embraces of the king. The king returns Bisclavret's lands to him and exiles his former wife and her husband. Many of the woman's subsequent female children are born without noses, and all her progeny are quite recognizable by their brutish appearances.

Clearly in this tale, the king is depicted as the wise and loving ruler who can right all wrongs; this includes the ability to lift the curse from a werewolf and transform it into its human form, a power typically held by a supreme being, rather than a mere mortal. Such a tale serves to support the divine right and authority of the king over his subjects.

With the rise of Christianity, replacing paganism in Europe, the werewolf became a diabolical entity, linked with witches and demons of the old religion. It was a creature to be shunned, or better eradicated by good God-fearing men, as evidenced by the many executions of people accused of witchcraft and werewolfery between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. This was despite the fact

that there were 'good' werewolves, such as the *benandanti* – literally, 'good walkers', who, as werewolves, combatted witches.

The *benandanti* were members of an agrarian visionary tradition in the Friuli district of northeastern Italy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They claimed that their souls travelled out of their bodies at night and rode spirit animals to battle evil witches, who were a continual threat to their crops. Sometimes the *benandanti* didn't bother with spirit mounts but simply shapeshifted into animals themselves, often into wolves. During the Roman Inquisition of the sixteenth century, many of them were brought to trial for practising witchcraft, or for heresy, since they claimed their work served Jesus Christ, rather than the Devil, whom their detractors accused them of serving. Most of them were found to be harmless and were let off with light sentences, at least by the standards of the times.

The story of St Francis of Assisi and the wolf of Gubbio is a metaphor for this shift in perception about the werewolf. The story tells of a ferocious wolf that roamed Umbria, around the little town of Gubbio. At first, the wolf attacked and ate only livestock, but after a while it turned its attention to humans and began killing and eating them. Hunters were sent out to kill the wolf, but none could prevail over the beast. Finally, St Francis set out into the wilderness to confront the wolf. As he made the sign of the cross, the wolf stopped growling and lay down as meekly as a lamb at the feet of the saint.

St Francis addressed the wolf, telling the creature how sinful it had been in killing God's creations. He made a bargain with the wolf that if the animal came back with him to Gubbio and promised to kill no more, the people would feed it and treat it well. To the amazement of the villagers, St Francis returned to Gubbio, the once-ferocious wolf docilely trailing behind him. True to the saint's promise, the people of Gubbio took care of the wolf, feeding it well. The wolf remained in the village, domesticated as any family dog, and was welcomed in the homes of the villagers until it died peacefully several years later.

By this tale, we see the power of the Christian God overcoming the pagan gods, the powers of darkness, as represented by the wolf and the werewolf. But the image of the werewolf as Devil incarnate shifted yet again in the industrial age, with the development of

science and technology. Just as people lost their superstitious fears of demons and witches and became more sophisticated in their views of the world, so too did their concept of the werewolf as a diabolical beast shift to the more accurate view of the creature as a quaint, pitiful remnant of outdated folklore. Although still vicious in its wolf form, the werewolf became seen as a more sympathetic character, one whose shapeshifting was more likely due to a curse put upon it than to any wilful desire on the part of the human to change into a wolf. In some ways, the werewolf seemed more a flawed human being, as all humans are flawed, than a supernatural monster, and so gained a closer affinity with man. One could look at the werewolf and say, 'there but for the grace of God go I.'

This shift in perception of the werewolf became evident in film. The 1935 film *Werewolf of London* tells the story of Wilfred Glendon, played by Henry Hull, who becomes a werewolf after being bitten by one in Tibet. In the 1941 film *The Wolf Man*, Larry Talbot, played by Lon Chaney, Jr, also becomes a werewolf after being bitten by one. David Naughton, in the role of a goofy American tourist also named David, is bitten by a werewolf on the moors of England and is transformed into a werewolf in the 1981 comedy-horror movie *An American Werewolf in London*. In all three movies, the newly created werewolves are innocent victims of a werewolf attack. None of them voluntarily sought the power to shapeshift into a wolf. Michael Landon, in the title role of the 1957 movie *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, was also an innocent victim, although his lycanthropy was caused not by the bite of a werewolf, but by a deliberate injection of a serum given to him by a mad doctor experimenting with returning man to his primal nature. In all these movies, the werewolves come to a bad end, killed but at least released from their bondage as werewolves. The figure of the werewolf, as depicted in these films and others of the time, could best be summed up by this line from *The Wolf Man*: 'Even a man who is pure in heart and says his prayers by night, may become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms, and the autumn moon is bright.'

True to its nature, however, the nature of the werewolf is shifting once again. In Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series of novels, begun in 2007, two types of shapeshifters can be found. The Children of the

Moon are shapeshifters in the traditional werewolf stereotype, as they transform into wolves at the full moon, and their bite contains venom that will turn their victims into werewolves. But Meyer has created a new type of shapeshifter in the werewolves of the fictional Native American tribe, the Quilete. According to the story, these shapeshifters – all of them beautiful, hunky young people – are genetic descendants of a spirit chief who could transform into a wolf. These shapeshifters are incredibly strong and fast, reaching speeds of more than 160 kilometres per hour (100 mph). Even in their human form, they are tall, ranging between 1.8 and 2.1 metres (6 and 7 ft), and have an extremely heightened sense of perception. They can control their shapeshifting, which they term 'phasing', although the change could be brought on spontaneously when they feel anger. They can detect vampires, their mortal enemies, and often fight them.

The werewolf image has shifted from shamanic magician, to diabolic servant, to hapless victim and to glamorous and sexy vampire-hunter. No doubt there will be even further iterations to the werewolf character. But are werewolves only 'characters'? What if they are real?

In Michigan in 1887, two lumberjacks gave chase to what they thought was a dog. Cornering the animal, they began to poke at it with sticks, for no good reason, but stopped and ran away terrified when the creature turned and raised itself up, revealing the form of a man with the head of a dog. Was the beast a werewolf, caught in the process of shapeshifting? The Dog-Man, as the thing has been called, made a few more appearances in the following decades but seems to have now disappeared. Werewolves, by contrast, have not vanished from the contemporary scene.

There have been reports since the 1930s of something werewolf-like in southeastern Wisconsin. A story from 1936 tells of a man named Mark Shackleman discovering a large, hairy creature digging in a Native American mound near Jefferson, Wisconsin. The creature stood erect at over 1.8 metres (6 ft) tall, had pointed ears and a doglike appearance. Before it ran off, Shackleman noticed the hands had four fingers and shrivelled thumbs. He returned the next night and once again saw the creature, which seemed to be trying to communicate in three-syllable growling.



Lon Chaney Jr, starring in *The Wolf Man* (1941).

The Werewolf

In 1989 Lorrienne Endrizzi spotted a werewolf in the same geographic area. It was squatting alongside the road close to her car. She reported that the creature's eyes were yellow-gold and glowed in the darkness and that it had a long face and an elongated snout like a wolf. She also said,

The arms were really kind of strange; jointed like a man or woman would be. He was holding his hands with his palms upward. The arms were muscular, like a man who had worked out a little bit. The back legs looked like they were behind him, like a person kneeling.

In yet another encounter in the same area of Wisconsin, this one in 1991, a woman driving at night felt her right front tyre jump from the road as though she had run over something. She got out of her car and saw a large, hairy, barrel-chested creature running toward her. Jumping back in her car, she tried to speed away, but the beast leaped upon her car boot. It could not hold onto the slippery metal and fell off as she accelerated.

Besides these reports, there have been several other werewolf sightings in southeastern Wisconsin, but the Badger State is not unique in that regard, as frequent sightings have also been recorded in California, Florida, Kentucky, Maine, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

In 1958 a Texas woman, while home alone, woke to the sound of something scratching against her bedroom window. A flash of lightning revealed a huge, shaggy, wolflike creature with bared white fangs, clawing at the screen and staring at her with baleful, glowing eyes. The woman leapt from her bed and grabbed a torch. The creature ran off into the bushes behind her garden, and when she trained the light outside, instead of illuminating a shaggy wolf, the figure of an extremely tall man emerged from the foliage and walked rapidly out of the garden, disappearing into the darkness beyond. Was it just a weird coincidence that both a wolf and a freakishly tall man happened simultaneously to appear on her property, or had she witnessed a genuine werewolf transformation?

Over a period of five months in 1996, 33 children in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India were carried off, killed and eaten by wolves. Hysteria swept through an impoverished region inhabited by more than nine million people, with thousands of villagers joining the hunt for wolves. But as the killings increased, a frenzy of rumours made people think such horrific violence could only be caused by werewolves. Strangers came under suspicion, accusations of werewolfery were made, and at least twenty people were lynched, causing the police to arrest 150 villagers. An article in the *New York Times* on 1 September 1996 recounts the testimony of a young girl who saw her four-year-old brother taken by a wolf:

'It came across the grass on all four paws, like this,' said Sita Devi, 10, the sister of the boy killed by a wolf in Banbirpur on Aug. 16, as she moved forward in a crouch from a cluster of villagers gathered by a well. She told her story with tears in her eyes, to anxious murmurs from the crowd . . . 'As it grabbed Anand, it rose onto two legs until it was tall as a man,' she said. 'Then it threw him over its shoulder. It was wearing a black coat, and a helmet and goggles.' . . . The girl's grandfather Ram Lakhan Panday, who drove a truck in Calcutta for 50 years before retiring to his native village, said: 'As long as officials pressure us to say it was a wolf, we'll say it was a wolf. But we have seen this thing with our own eyes. It is not a wolf; it is a human being.'

Harold M. Young, a British bureaucrat serving in Burma (now Myanmar), spent much time among the Shan people, where he heard tales of a werewolf-like creature called *taw*. In 1960 he had a weird encounter with one. As told in Christopher Dane's book *The Occult in the Orient*, Young was visiting a Shan village one moonlit evening, when he heard strange noises coming from a hut. He cautiously approached the hut and peered in through a window:

Inside the hut was a ghastly creature, chewing slowly on the slashed neck of a dying woman. The hideous beast could only

be described as half-human, half-beast. Its body was covered with coarse hair. Its face was grotesque; its eyes small and red. Its mouth showed cruel fangs, dropping blood and spittle as it worked deeper into the woman's flesh.

Young fired his pistol at the beast, which leapt up and ran into the jungle. Young and the villagers gave chase but lost the beast in the dense foliage. They resumed the search in the morning and picked up a trail of blood, which circled back to the village and led to a hut. Bursting into the hut, the men found a dead man lying there, a bullet wound in his side. One of the villagers spat on the corpse, uttering the single word, *taw*, meaning 'shapeshifter'.⁴

A 2016 report from Hull, England, cites a towering 2.4-metre (8-ft) werewolf, spotted by several terrified residents. The beast was first sighted at an old water channel in an abandoned industrial area outside the town centre. Residents believe the creature is Old Striker, a centuries-old, legendary werewolf said to roam the Yorkshire Downs. One terrified witness, standing on a bridge over the channel, said she saw the beast shapeshifting from man to wolf and saw it running on all fours and upright on two legs. It vaulted 9 metres (30 ft) over the channel, up an embankment and bounded off. Another saw the beast eating a German shepherd; it leapt over a 2.4-metre (8-ft) fence, the dead dog still clenched in its jaws as it ran off.

Cannock Chase, a deeply wooded area in central England, in Staffordshire, has a long history of werewolf sightings. Over the last thirty years, 21 sightings have been reported, the last one in 2009. Witness accounts are all similar: the appearance of what seems to be a large dog, drawing itself erect on two hind legs and running off into the forest when approached.

Werewolf sightings have been reported all around the world, creating an international treasure trove of werewolf lore. Here is a partial list of countries with their associated werewolves:

Argentina – the *lobizón*, a fox-like werewolf

Bulgaria – the *vrkolak*, a werewolf that turns into a vampire after death

- China – the *lang ren*
 France – the *loup-garou*
 Iceland – the *varulfur*
 Italy – the *lupo mannaro*
 Latvia – the *vilkacis*, whose name means
 ‘wolf eyes’
 Mexico – the *nahual* can turn into a wolf,
 large cat, eagle or bull
 Norway and Sweden – the *cigi einhamir*
 transforms by wearing a wolfskin
 Philippines – the *aswang* is a vampire-werewolf
 Portugal – the *lobb omen* is the typical werewolf,
 but there is also the *bruxsa*, a vampire-werewolf
 Russia – the *bodark*
 Serbia – the *wurdalak* is a werewolf that has died
 and become a vampire
 Slovakia – the *vlkodlak* is a werewolf that has
 been transformed through sorcery
 Spain – the *lobo hombre*

While the werewolf is one of the best-known examples of shapeshifting, it should be noted that there are many other kinds of were-animals into which a person can transform. It is said there are giant wolves, *wabeela*, in Alaska that may be descended from bear-dogs, but there is a far more unusual shapeshifter in that frozen wilderness. According to the stories of the Tlingit and Tsimshian Indians of southeastern Alaska, the *kushtaka* is a were-otter that can imitate human voices while in otter form and create visions that lull a drowning sailor into thinking he is hearing and seeing his loved ones. While in this state, the *kushtaka* can save the sailor by turning him into an otter, thus allowing him to swim to safety; some may not consider that a fair trade. The *kushtaka* also has an evil side and may mimic the cries of a baby or the screams of a woman to lure victims to the river. Once there, the *kushtaka* either kills the person and tears him or her to shreds, or turns the victim into another *kushtaka*; it particularly likes to prey on children.

The swamps in Louisiana's Cajun country are said to be inhabited by *rougarou*, creatures with human bodies and wolf or dog heads. Their name is a corruption of *loup-garou*, French for ‘werewolf’, and they are closely related to their French cousins. Both are said to prey on Catholics who break Lent for seven consecutive years, but their appetites are ecumenical; they'll eat anyone. The *rougarou* is usually under a contagious curse that lasts 101 days. Anyone from whom the creature draws blood will turn into a *rougarou*. During the day, the *rougarou* is in its human form, safe from detection and from being killed.

Elsewhere, in Africa, the *bouda*, found in countries as diverse as Ethiopia, Morocco and Tanzania, is a blacksmith who is also a sorcerer, capable of transforming himself into a were-hyena. In his shapeshifter body, the sorcerer still wears an ornament from his human form by which he can be recognized.

Scandinavian berserkers believed themselves transformed into wolves or bears, and were-bears have been noted in other cultures. Stories of men shapeshifting into bears can be found among various Native American nations and in Slavic and Russian cultures. In pre-Christian Slavic cultures, Veles was worshipped as the god of fields, pastures, forests, crops and animals, particularly cattle. Veles was a shapeshifter, and his preferred form was that of a bear. A powerful god in Slavic mythology, Veles suffered a final transformation with the advent of Christianity, this time into St Basil.

There are too many other were-animal stories from other cultures to discuss adequately in these pages. Still, among them all, the werewolf seems to reign supreme, capturing the fevered imaginations – and worst nightmares – of people all around the world.

7 The Vampire

Somewhere in a bedchamber drenched in moonlight, a beautiful young woman sleeps. But she sleeps fitfully, her slumber bedevilled by frightful dreams. Restlessly tossing and turning, a scratching sound at her casement window awakens her. She sits up in bed, terrified to see a huge bat with glowing red eyes hovering just outside the open window. Too terrified to scream, she can only sit helplessly and watch as the bat flies in through the window, circles over her bed and then disappears. In its place stands a tall gaunt figure dressed in black, a man as pale as death, with hypnotic eyes that pierce her very soul. He draws closer, extending one hand to her – an invitation of sorts – the talon-like fingernails black and sharp as razors. Her eyes locked on his, she cannot move; she cannot even think of moving, even as he bends over her, baring fangs like daggers gleaming in the moonlight. It must be a dream, a horrible nightmare, but no, the pain is too real, too intense, as he sinks his fangs into the warm flesh of her neck, greedily drinking of her life's blood. It is the first bite, but it won't be the last, and soon she, too, will stalk the night as one of the bloodthirsty undead.

Utter the word 'vampire', and a scene similar to the imagined one above will immediately spring to mind. It is certainly the stereotypical image of every vampire movie or novel ever created since Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*, which set the standard for interpretations of the vampire. Yet that image and that kind of vampire is a relatively

modern invention and differs in many ways from ancient folkloric traditions about these immortal, bloodsucking creatures.

Abraham 'Bram' Stoker was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1847. While he was a student at Trinity College, he became interested in theatre and, upon graduation, became a theatre critic. His favourable review of actor Henry Irving's role in a production of *Hamlet* caught the actor's eye; the two became friends, and Irving hired Stoker as his personal assistant and business manager of his Lyceum Theatre in London. In his spare time, Stoker was writing – short pieces mostly, which attracted little attention, although he gained some minor celebrity for, of all things, a book titled *The Duties of Clerks of Petty Sessions in Ireland*, which became a standard. His first novel, *The Snake's Pass*, was published in 1890.

In his role as Irving's assistant, Stoker had the opportunity to travel widely, although he never visited Eastern Europe, where *Dracula* is partly set. He did meet the Hungarian writer and traveller Ármín Vámbéry, who regaled Stoker with historic tales and folktales from his homeland, especially Transylvania. These tales fired Stoker's imagination, and he spent countless hours in libraries and museums, delving deeper into the history and culture of that region. Somewhere in his research, he discovered the story of Vlad Tepes, the historical fifteenth-century prince of Wallachia, who became, in part, the model for the fictional Count Dracula. Stoker's notes on his work do not mention Prince Vlad (or Vlad Dracula) by name, but there are references made in the novel that indicate the prince's influence as the vampire model. In the novel, Count Dracula speaks of his lineage, connecting himself with Prince Vlad:

who was it but one of my own race who as Voivode crossed the Danube and beat the Turk on his own ground! This was a Dracula indeed. Who was it that his own unworthy brother, when he had fallen, sold his people to the Turk and brought the shame of slavery on them? Was it not this Dracula, indeed, who inspired that other of his race who in a later age again and again brought his forces over the great river into Turkeyland; who, when he was beaten back, came

again, and again, and again, though he had come alone from the bloody field where his troops had been slaughtered, since he knew that he alone could ultimately triumph.¹

The history here related by Count Dracula is based loosely on the history of Prince Vlad. Vlad Tepes, also known as Vlad the Impaler, was born in Sighisoara in 1431, the son of Prince Vlad II of Wallachia. That same year, Vlad II was made a knight of the Order of the Dragon, a Christian brotherhood pledged to fight the infidel Turks. Members of the Order were required to wear a medallion with the order's insignia, a winged dragon with claws outstretched, its jaw half open, its tail curled around its head. The dragon hung prostrate, its back cleft in two, before a double cross, symbolizing Christianity's triumph over Islam. The dragon symbol became associated with Prince Vlad's family, giving them the name Dracul, which means 'dragon' in Romanian; unfortunately, or perhaps prophetically, it can also mean 'the Devil'.

Vlad II Dracul, who had been contesting the throne of Wallachia with a half-brother, was finally put on the throne by King Sigismund when the king deposed the half-brother in 1434 because he had been seeking better relations with the Turks. Two years later, Vlad entered the city of Targoviste, making it his capital, and officially became Prince of Wallachia.

Vlad Dracula, which means 'son of Dracul', grew up in his father's court, where he learned the military and political skills necessary for the survival of any ruler in the turbulent Middle Ages. In 1437 King Sigismund, patron of the Dracul family, died. Shortly thereafter, Prince Vlad II brokered an alliance with the Turks. To ensure the prince's loyalty, the younger Vlad and his brother, Radu, were held in captivity by the Turks for several years. In Turkey, Vlad Dracula became an officer in the sultan's army and learned the language and customs of his captors, including Turkish military tactics and torture methods.

When his father and older brother were murdered by the Hungarian governor, John Hunyadi, Vlad Dracula escaped Turkish captivity and tried to retake the throne of Wallachia. He eventually succeeded with the help of the man who murdered his relatives.

Prince Vlad Dracula was, by all accounts, a sadistic ruler, even for those times when rulers reigned through fear and execution. Constantly fighting Turkish invaders and others seeking to overthrow him, Vlad Dracula ruled with a heavy hand. Cruel executions were common. His preferred method of torture and execution was impalement, in which a sharpened stake was inserted up the victim's anus and shoved up along the spine until it emerged from the mouth or the top of the head. The stake was then set upright in the ground, leaving the victim to die a slow and painful death. Once, faced with an invading Turkish army, Vlad Dracula impaled 10,000 Turkish prisoners he was holding and set them up all along the road upon which the enemy would advance, his 'forest of impalement' serving as an early example of psychological warfare.

He was as strict with his own people. Petty crimes could mean death by impalement. He used the stake against anyone who offended his personal sense of honesty and sexual morality. Ever wary of foreigners – even the Saxon merchants who had been allowed to settle in Wallachia and developed prosperous towns such as Sighisoara and Brasov – Vlad Dracula carried out raids against them, executing untold numbers.

It has been estimated that Vlad Dracula executed as many as 40,000 people, perhaps as many as 100,000, during his six-year reign. Sometime either in December 1476 or January 1477, Vlad Dracula died, either killed by the Turks or an unknown assassin. He is buried in a little monastery on a peaceful island in Lake Snagov, just north of Bucharest.

In the historical accounts, there is no mention of Vlad Dracula being a vampire, so how did Stoker make that connection? While there are no historical accounts citing Vlad Dracula as a vampire, folk legends abound in Romania that tell of him violating and murdering scores of boys and girls, using their blood to maintain his youth and health. This legend sounds remarkably like the true-life case of Countess Elizabeth Bathory of Hungary, who was accused of torturing and killing 650 girls and bathing in their blood to maintain her youth and beauty. She was convicted in 1611 and sentenced to life imprisonment. Could Stoker have known this story as well and attributed it to his Count Dracula?

In any case, the real-life Vlad Dracula is closely connected to the fictional Count Dracula, and both are highly marketable commodities in Romania. The house in Sighisoara where Vlad Dracula was born is now Casa Dracula restaurant, featuring dinner plates emblazoned with a dragon. Busts and portraits of Vlad Dracula adorn the restaurant, and at the bar, one can order a bottle of Dracula Merlot. The *pièce de résistance*, however, is the upstairs room, where, for a small fee, one can see a hammy actor lying in an open coffin, his lips bloody red and white fangs gleaming in the garish red light of the room.

In his research for the novel, Stoker came across a picture of Bran Castle, which he used as the model for Count Dracula's castle. One can visit the castle but only after fighting through the crowded bazaar below it, where Dracula T-shirts and hats, posters, postcards, books, dolls, fake fangs and every other possible type of Dracula kitsch imaginable are sold. Vlad Dracul's capital at Targoviste is not yet infected with the merchandizing bug, although there is a small gift shop in the ticket office. At Targoviste, one can see the ruins of the family Dracul's palace and can even ascend the Chindi Tower, the watchtower from which Vlad Dracula observed the sufferings of those he impaled in the courtyard below.

In Cluj-Napoca, Romania, is the Hotel Transilvania, where, according to Stoker's novel, the fictional Jonathan Harker stayed as he made his way to visit Count Dracula. In the novel, the hotel is named the Continental, but all the references and directions in the book clearly point to Hotel Transilvania being Stoker's model for his Continental Hotel. In the novel, Harker orders chicken paprika for his lunch at the hotel. Today, 'Johnathan Harker chicken paprika' is on the hotel menu. The updated hotel is small, with rooms situated around a central courtyard, and the management is in the process of creating a Jonathan Harker Suite that will be outfitted in Victorian-era furnishings and Dracula memorabilia.

There is a love-hate relationship in Romania with Vlad Dracula. Some Romanians consider him a national hero, or simply welcome the tourist dollars his legacy has created. The Romanian postal service even went as far as to issue a series of lurid Dracula stamps, featuring not Vlad Dracula, but the Count Dracula of film and literary fame.



Statue of Vlad Tepes in Targoviste, Romania.

Other Romanians, especially those who identify as Hungarians, resent the 'Romania for Romanians' policies of Vlad Dracula and consider him an evil murderer.

The modern vampire character owes much to Stoker's invented Romanian count, which is appropriate since some of the earliest



From the summit of the Chindi Tower in his palace at Targoviste, Romania, Vlad Tepes could watch as his victims were impaled in the courtyard below.

mentions of vampires originate in Eastern Europe. The word 'vampire' stems from the Serbian *vampir*. Vampire accounts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Serbia and other Eastern European countries form the basis for our modern notions about vampires, even though vampiric beings appear in stories from almost every culture worldwide, some of them dating back for millennia. Many

of these ancient bloodsucking creatures were spirits or demons, but not necessarily the immortal, reanimated corpse variety of vampire with which we are familiar today.

One of the earliest written reports of vampiric activity dates from 1672 in a village in what is now Croatia. A peasant named Jure Grando died in 1656, and shortly thereafter the villagers claimed he had returned from the dead, sexually assaulted his widow and terrorized them by drinking their blood. Although the claims could not be proven, local authorities took no chances and exhumed the corpse, driving a stake through its heart to put it to rest. But the stake was not enough to slay the vampire: the attacks continued until the villagers once again exhumed the corpse and, this time, cut off the head.

In the eighteenth century, a plague of alleged vampire attacks swept Eastern Europe, spreading terror and mass hysteria among the people, beginning in 1721 and lasting about thirteen years. There are two famous cases from that period. The first concerned a man named Petar Blagojevich, who died at age 62 and then supposedly returned to his home shortly after his death, told his son he was hungry and demanded food. Perhaps he was simply too terrified to comply, but the son refused to feed his father's corpse. The next day, the son was found dead in his house. After that, people claimed the elder Blagojevich attacked some neighbours, who died from blood loss. They dug up his body, drove a stake through its heart and then burned the corpse to ashes.

The second case concerns a man named Arnod Paole, an ex-soldier who had claimed to have been bitten years before by a vampire while serving in Turkish Serbia, although he apparently suffered no ill effects from the attack. He said that he had taken precautions after the attack to avoid becoming a vampire by eating the earth from the vampire's grave and smearing himself with the vampire's blood. Taking up a new life as a farmer, he worked at that job for several years until he broke his neck in a fall from a hay wagon and died. About a month later, people in the area complained about being harassed by Paole, and four people were reportedly killed by him. The villagers exhumed Paole's body and found it to be seemingly uncorrupted, with evidence of fresh blood that had flowed from his eyes, ears, nose and mouth.

Taking these as sure signs of vampirism, the people staked the corpse and burned it.

Since Paole had infected four other people, their bodies, too, were dug up, staked and burnt. To make matters worse, people believed Paole, as a vampire, had also fed on their cattle, infecting them, and passing vampirism on to villagers who had eaten the flesh of infected cattle. As a result, as many as seventeen other bodies were exhumed and treated to the same brutal vampire executions.

Vampire hysteria spread throughout the region and beyond, in places like Poland, Hungary, Silesia, Moravia, Austria and Lorraine. Scholars, theologians and court officials all weighed in on the controversy as they tried to figure out how best to rid themselves of the undead bloodsuckers. Certainly, the high level of superstitious beliefs in rural communities contributed to the assumption that unexpected or unusual deaths must be caused by a vampire and that vampirism was contagious.

In 1751 Dom Augustine Calmet, a French theologian and scholar, published a treatise on vampires and other supernatural entities titled *Treatise on the Apparitions of Spirits and on Vampires or Revenants*. It is a comprehensive work, reflecting his several years of research and gathering judicial reports and anecdotal stories from all around Europe, and then evaluating their validity. In this passage, Calmet affirms the possibility that vampires exist:

They [witnesses] see, it is said, men who have been dead for several months, come back to earth, talk, walk, infest villages, ill use both men and beasts, suck the blood of their near relations, make them ill, and finally cause their death; so that people can only save themselves from their dangerous visits and their hauntings by exhuming them, impaling them, cutting off their heads, tearing out the heart, or burning them. These revenants are called by the name of *oupires* or vampires, that is to say, leeches; and such particulars are related of them, so singular, so detailed, and invested with such probable circumstances and such judicial information, that one can hardly refuse to credit the belief which is held in

those countries, that these revenants come out of their tombs and produce those effects which are proclaimed of them.²

Empress Maria Theresa of Austria finally put an end to the hysteria when she ordered her personal physician, Gerard van Sweiten, to investigate these cases of alleged vampirism. He concluded that vampires did not exist. The empress then passed laws prohibiting the desecration of graves and corpses. Other countries followed with similar laws, effectively putting an end to the activities of vampire hunters.

Yet the vampire myth persisted, and reports of vampiric activity continued to surface, even into the nineteenth century, perhaps aided by Stoker's novel and some earlier fictional works, such as *Varney the Vampire* by James Malcolm Rymer and Thomas Peckett Prest; *Carmilla*, by Sheridan Le Fanu; and the short story 'The Vampyre', often attributed to Lord Byron but actually written by his physician, John Polidori. Laws may have been enacted to protect the eternal rest of the innocent dead, but they did not stop people from believing in vampires.

In the U.S. in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the belief was particularly widespread in New England, especially in Rhode Island, eastern Connecticut and Vermont. Tuberculosis, called 'consumption' in those times, was a common and contagious, incurable disease that carried off many people, young and old alike. Even though tuberculosis was a known medical disease, some people living in rural communities still harboured the suspicion that the contagion could be blamed on a family member who, having died from consumption, returned at night over several visitations to prey on other family members. Extreme measures were taken to ensure the dead did not rise again; hearts were cut out and burnt, and, in one case, a young boy was buried beneath several feet of concrete to prevent him from climbing out of his grave.

One of the most celebrated cases of alleged vampirism from the 'New England vampire panic', as contemporary newspapers called it, was that of Mercy Lena Brown, of Exeter, Rhode Island. Mercy's mother, Mary Eliza, contracted tuberculosis, which quickly spread

throughout the family and killed her mother in 1882. Mercy's sister, Mary Olive, passed away the following year at age twenty. Within a few years, Mercy's brother, Edwin, sickened and moved to Colorado Springs hoping to regain his health. Nearly a decade after her mother and sister died, Mercy came down with the disease and died in 1892, at the age of nineteen. Despite his relocation, Edwin also became unwell and, shortly before his sister's death, returned to Rhode Island in critical condition.

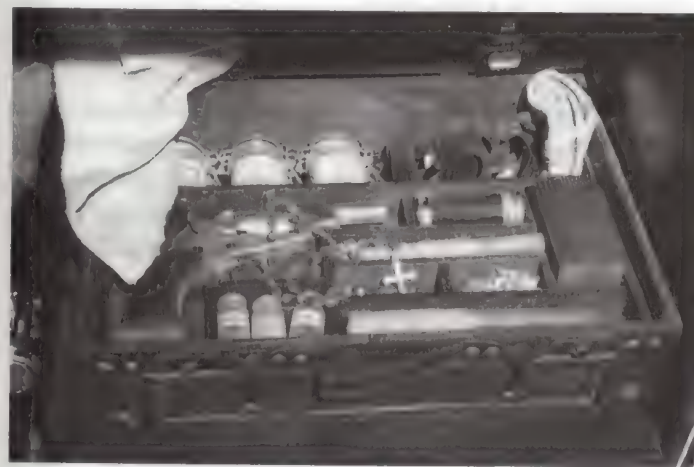
Two months after Mercy's death, while Edwin lay dying, some neighbours approached Mercy's father, George, with the suggestion that perhaps some diabolical force was stalking the Brown family, a force that could turn on them as well. George agreed to the exhumation of his wife and daughters. In March 1892, a party of men, accompanied by the Browns' family doctor and a reporter from the *Providence Journal*, dug up the bodies and opened the caskets. They found Mary Eliza and Mary Olive's bodies to have been reduced to mere bones, but the newly buried corpse of Mercy showed few signs of decomposition. As the newspaper correspondent wrote, 'The heart and liver were removed, and in cutting open the heart, clotted and decomposed blood was found.' The fact that Mercy's body showed little decomposition could certainly be attributed to her being dead only two months and buried during a New England winter in refrigerator-cold ground. Yet the neighbours believed the blood found in the heart was proof that Mercy had been feeding on the living. They removed Mercy's heart and liver, burnt them to ash, and fed them to Edwin as an antidote for his sickness. He died less than two months later.

A common theme that occurs with alleged vampire exhumations, no matter where or in what period, is the 'fresh' condition of the corpse. Unlike the gaunt, pale, almost skeletal depictions of vampires given to us by Bram Stoker and numerous movie actors, the traditional vampire was often fleshy, if not plump, and ruddy in complexion, appearing almost as hale and hearty as a living person. Fresh blood might be found in the heart of a 'vampire' corpse, or the corpse might bleed from the mouth, nose, eyes and ears. The fingernails look as though they have grown, and what could be construed as new skin

is evident. Upon opening the casket, the vampire might suddenly sit up, and when a stake is driven through its heart, it could groan in apparent agony. It is no wonder that superstitious, uneducated people would interpret these findings as 'proof' the corpse was a vampire, when they were really nothing more than the naturally occurring processes of bodily decomposition.

After death, gases are created in the body that cause it to swell and bloat. While blood typically congeals in a corpse, depending upon how the person died, the blood may liquefy again, which could account for it flowing from various orifices. As the epidermis disintegrates and falls away, the dermis is revealed, which could be mistaken for 'new skin', and the fingernails would now appear longer than normal. As bodily fluids dry up, the muscles and tissues of the stomach and digestive tract are reduced, sometimes causing a contraction that would cause the corpse to sit up. And that agonized groan as the stake is driven through the heart may be explained by the sudden expulsion of gases when the corpse is pierced, just like popping a balloon.

In some cases, a male corpse might exhibit an erection. Although there is a scientific explanation for this phenomenon – namely, blood



A Romanian vampire hunter's kit held everything one needed to kill a vampire, including garlic and a sharp stake.

accumulating in the lower extremities, a condition that could be found in men who died by hanging or strangulation, or who died in a vertical or prone position – to the uneducated vampire hunters, it was yet another sign of vampirism. Despite being dead, it was believed vampires were sexual beings, capable of having their way with female victims through their hypnotic abilities. They were rapists. In some folkloric traditions, it was thought the vampire's sexual drive was so strong that it alone was enough to cause him to rise from the grave.

The Roma people of Eastern Europe believed the vampire's sexual appetite to be insatiable, sometimes leading to a mortal woman becoming pregnant and delivering a son, called a *dhampir*. The *dhampirs* had the ability to detect vampires and were valued for their abilities to hunt down and destroy – usually with a simple pistol shot – the undead creatures. Some alleged *dhampirs* made a living by hiring themselves out as professional vampire hunters to the Roma community.

The vampire's sexuality was merely hinted at in early novels such as *Dracula*, although an astute reader could probably surmise that vampires did more than simply bite the neck of their victims. Still, the hardcore action remained off both the page and screen until recent decades, which have seen the creation of more explicit vampire novels, such as Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, and pornographic vampire movies like *Dracula (The Dirty Old Man)*, *Lust at First Bite*, *The Nude Vampire* and *Erotikill*.

Female vampires exuded sexuality as well. The *langsuyar* of Malaysia was a desirable young female vampire who, oddly, could marry, bear children and live a normal village life until some accident revealed her identity. Interestingly, almost all the first vampires in literature were female, which speaks volumes for their sexuality acting as a lure to draw readers. Reputedly the first vampire in English literature was Geraldine, the villain in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *Christabel*, written in 1797. In Robert Southey's 1801 poem *Thalaba the Destroyer*, Thalaba, the hero of the poem, destroys the vampire inhabiting his deceased wife Oneiza's body. The eponymous vampire in Le Fanu's novella *Carmilla*, written in 1872, is one of the most popular female vampires of all time. This tale introduced themes of lesbianism into

the vampire narrative, for the two-hundred-year-old Carmilla mostly preyed upon young women.

It is important to note that, unlike other shapeshifters such as werewolves, the vampire is not a living human being: it is a reanimated corpse. Essentially, a vampire is the spirit of an evil being, a witch or a suicide that remains as a revenant in its human body in the grave. In some cultures, it is believed that a vampire is born with two spirits, one of which is devoted to the destruction of mankind. The spirit is thought to reside in the heart, so to kill the vampire, it is necessary to drive a stake through its heart and to burn the organ as an added precaution.

To keep the corpse from decomposing as a host body, the vampire needs to feed on human blood. In some legends, the vampire could induce a hypnotic state in its victim, thereby allowing it easy access. Once bitten by a vampire, the victim would waste away and eventually die, becoming a vampire. Traditional vampires were night stalkers who shunned the daylight hours by finding shelter in their graves. As shapeshifters, they had the ability to transform into any animal they wished, although the bat is most closely associated with vampiric shapeshifting. As spirits, vampires cast no reflections in mirrors, could not be caught if out of their coffins and could not cross running water.

Many primitive cultures believed the spirit, the soul, was only casually attached to its body, and, in fact, left it during sleep or when a person was otherwise unconscious. Upon death, the spirit left the body permanently. One reason given for the apparent ability of a dead body to live on, as with a vampire, was that the dead person's spirit or image would appear in the dreams of the living. In effect, the living were unconsciously keeping the dead 'alive'. This idea is often expressed in vampire stories, with the vampire appearing in the victim's dreams, or when the victim is rendered unconscious in a hypnotic state; the dreams of bloodsucking or being choked are visitations from the undead.

This fear of the soul being stolen by evil influences during sleep was a common one in earlier times, as this anonymous twelfth-century children's prayer reveals:

Now I lay me down to sleep,
 I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
 Should I die before I wake,
 I pray the Lord my soul to take.

This idea of a dual nature of spirit and body gave rise to the theory of astral vampirism, developed by Henry Steel Olcott, the first president of the Theosophical Society, which was founded in New York City in 1875. The Theosophical Society, which is still in existence, has as its goals to form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour; to encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science; and to investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man.

Olcott believed that each person had a physical body but also a second body, usually invisible, although sometimes it was seen leaving the physical body after death. This astral body was thought to be the explanation for ghosts and out-of-body experiences. Olcott speculated that when a person was presumed dead, but in a catatonic state and buried prematurely, his astral body allowed him to remain alive in the grave for long periods of time. It did this by rising from the grave and sucking the blood of the living as nourishment, and then returning to its physical body.

The idea of premature burial may seem ludicrous to modern audiences, but in the nineteenth century and earlier, it was a very real fear, so much so that numerous devices were invented to allow a supposedly dead but revived person to summon help to rescue him from his coffin. One such device was a cord snaked through a tube from the coffin to above ground and attached to a bell. Upon regaining consciousness in his coffin, a person could call for help by pulling the cord and ringing the bell, thus giving rise to the common expression, 'saved by the bell'.

Olcott makes the distinction, as do others who study vampires, that it is not the blood per se that nourishes and reanimates a corpse, but it is some unknown essence, some 'life force', that is at work. Olcott recommended cremation of a corpse, rather than burial, as

a means of deterring vampirism, since it severed the connection between the physical and astral bodies.

This notion of an astral body was, in part, what gave rise to the Chinese belief in vampires. The Chinese believed that each person had two souls, a superior or rational soul, and an inferior irrational soul. At night, the superior soul could leave the sleeping body and was free to wander where it pleased. During that time, it could also enter another body, possessing it, and speaking through it. The inferior soul, the *p'ai*, did not wander but remained with the body, even after death. If the *p'ai* was strong, it would reanimate the corpse for its own purposes. The reanimated corpse was called a *chiang-shi*, a vampire. Unlike European vampires, the transformation from dead human to vampire had to occur before the corpse was buried. The *chiang-shi* was very strong and violent, attacking and raping women and killing its victims, male and female, by ripping off their heads and limbs.

In many parts of West Africa, it is believed that a witch can leave its body at night and travel as a glowing ball of light, attacking people, mostly children, and sucking their blood. Witchcraft is responsible for much of the vampirism in Africa, since witches are said to have the power to shapeshift into various animal forms, especially a rat or cat, and can reanimate the dead. Much less violent than the Chinese *chiang-shi*, West African vampires were more likely to kill their victims slowly through psychic vampirism.

'Energetic vampirism', a term used by famed medium Roy Masters, is another form of vampirism that does not require the taking of blood. Franz Hartmann, also a theosophical researcher, coined the term 'psychic sponges' for people who unconsciously sucked up the energy of any sensitive person with whom they came in contact. He did not speculate on what made one person sensitive, while another was not, but the magnetic vampire could cause lassitude and a lack of vitality among the sensitives. Hartmann believed the 'sponge' to be possessed by a vampiric entity that continually drained the energy of both its host and those around him.

In addition to premature burial and possession by a vampire, as in magnetic vampirism, there are many other ways one may become

a vampire. As with werewolves, the bite of the vampire is contagious, in that the victim then becomes a vampire; the process is not immediate, but happens over several encounters with the vampire. In some parts of Eastern Europe, children born with teeth are destined to become vampires, and in Russia, for reasons unknown, alcoholics are said to be prime candidates for vampirism after death. In some countries, Christians who convert to Islam, or priests who say Mass in a state of mortal sin are destined for the same fate. Almost anyone, it seems, could become a vampire. In her book *Vampire: The Complete Guide to the World of the Undead*, Manuela Dunn Mascetti writes: 'In general, witches, sorcerers, the godless, the evil-doers, werewolves, robbers, arsonists, prostitutes, deceitful and treacherous barmaids, and other different and dishonorable people have the potential to come back from the dead and take the guise of a vampire.'³

No matter how a vampire is created, all vampires share the insatiable thirst for blood, although not always from humans. There is a type of vampire in Bulgaria called an *ustrel*, the spirit of a child born on a Saturday that has died before receiving baptism. On the ninth day after its burial, an *ustrel* would climb out of its grave and attack cattle or sheep, drinking their blood, before returning to its grave before dawn. It would do this for several days until it became strong enough that it no longer had to return to its grave but could seek a place elsewhere to rest during the day. The unusual place in which it generally settled was either between the horns of a calf, or between the hind legs of a milk cow! Although invisible to most people, the deaths of several animals from a herd each night were sure evidence an *ustrel* was at work, and it was time to call in the *vampirdzhija*, the vampire hunter. Luckily for the owner of the herd, the *vampirdzhija* was blessed with the ability to see vampires and knew the proper rituals to put them to rest.

Bulgaria also had another type of vampire hunter, known as a *djadadjii*, who, rather than driving a stake through the creature's heart, preferred to bottle the vampire. Using a holy icon, the *djadadjii* chased the vampire, icon in hand, herding the creature towards a bottle stuffed with the vampire's favourite food. As soon as the vampire entered the bottle, the *djadadjii* corked it. Then he threw the bottle

with the trapped vampire into a fire. This depiction of the vampire is quite different from the more modern characterizations that endow the vampire with superhuman strength and shapeshifting abilities.

In Romania as well, an unbaptized child could become a vampire, as could a child born out of wedlock, or who had an irregular birth, such as being born with a caul, a part of the amniotic sac, on its head. A pregnant woman who did not eat salt or allowed a vampire to see her could herself become one of the undead.

Romanian vampires, called *strigoi morti*, differed significantly from the fictional Romanian vampire Count Dracula. Like poltergeists, they could create noises in a dwelling and had the unusual gift of being able to bring everyday objects to life. Their bite was rarely fatal. The vampires were more apt to drain their victim's life force through psychic vampirism.

The association of vampirism with pregnancy, childbirth or mothers dying as they give birth is found outside Europe as well. The mythology of India has many creatures that exhibit vampiric qualities, and the frightening goddess Kali was known to favour the battlefield, where she could drink the blood of her victims. In Gujarat, a woman who died an unnatural death could become a *churel*, who would rise from the dead to harass her family if they had mistreated her in life – the *churel* would also wither the blood vessels of male family members, drying the blood inside their bodies. Sometimes the *churel* would entice a young man and offer him food. If he ate the food and spent the night with her, he would wake at dawn to find himself transformed into a grey-haired old man. Blinded by the *churel*'s beauty and culinary skills, the young man would never notice the obvious sign of the *churel* – her feet were turned backwards.

Another Indian vampire was the *chedipe*, who, naked, rode a tiger at night, seeking victims. When she found the home of a sleeping man, she would put the household under her spell through hypnotism, and then suck the man's blood from his toe. In the morning, the man would awaken feeling weak. If he did not seek medical treatment, the *chedipe* would return, thereby slowly draining away his life force.

In Mexico, stories of vampires can be found dating back to the Mayan civilization. The ancient text *Popol Vuh* speaks of a ferocious

character named Camazotz, guardian of the Bat House. Sharp-nosed, with large teeth and claws, he was described as a man-bat, perhaps the first reference ever to a man transforming into a bat, a trope that became ubiquitous among vampire characters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Mayan and Aztec cultures had their share of vampiric gods and goddesses and, even after the invasion of the Spanish conquistadores and the ascension of Roman Catholicism over the native religion, these beings lived on, but in an altered form. The Spanish called them *brujas* – that is, ‘witches’ – but to the native population, they were known as *tlahuelpuchi*.

The *tlahuelpuchi* was a shapeshifter, usually a woman, who had the power to transform into any number of animals and, while in that animal form, attack and suck the blood of infants, although rarely attacking adults. Turkeys were a favourite animal form of the *tlahuelpuchi*, but cats, dogs, buzzards and even fleas could also be vampires in their transformed state. The *tlahuelpuchi* was born a witch, purely by chance, with her powers of transformation arriving with her first menses. Along with those powers came an insatiable thirst for human blood. The vampire had hypnotic powers and could cause people in her control to kill themselves. Although *tlahuelpuchi* tried their best to keep their identities a secret from their community, they were not always successful. Once detected, their end came swiftly, with villagers clubbing or stoning them to death.

Vampires truly remain the undead, as they are more popular now than ever before in books, movies and television. Moreover, there are many who say vampires still walk among us. In parts of the world, vampires are very much a part of the culture, to be feared and despised to be sure, but ever present nevertheless. In 1954 the Mexican state of Tlaxcala created a law requiring the bodies of babies killed by witchcraft (vampires) to be handed over to medical authorities. Sporadic recent reports of vampires have come from South Africa and parts of Eastern Europe.

And then, there are the communities of vampires, living side by side with the rest of us. John Edgar Browning is an American author, editor and scholar recognized as an expert on vampires. Browning conducted a two-year study of New Orleans vampires for his doctoral

dissertation and later extended his work to the community of vampires in Buffalo, New York.

The vampires he studied are not cut from the same cloth as Count Dracula. They are neither undead nor immortal. They do not shapeshift into bats or anything else and garlic has no effect on them. But these ‘real vampires’, as they are called, do share with Count Dracula a need for blood, human or animal, convinced their desire for blood is a biological imperative. According to Browning,

They feed out of what they are convinced is a biological need, one that generally appears during or just after puberty. Without their monthly, weekly, or sometimes daily feeding rituals, vampires claim, it becomes difficult for them to function – if they go too long without blood or ‘energy,’ they can become weak, developing a host of physical and emotional symptoms that only a feeding can soothe.⁴

Browning further writes that feedings are regulated by the Donor Bill of Rights, which essentially says that blood donors must be voluntary and have full knowledge of what they are about to undertake; blood testing of both the vampire and the donor is strongly recommended. Blood extraction is done through sterile, quasi-medical procedures, not unlike what a medical technologist might do, if he were also a vampire. In addition to ‘sanguinarians’, the term used for blood-drinking vampires, there are psychic vampires, who live on the ‘energy’ or ‘life force’ of others. Unlike the psychic vampires of old, these modern vampires are also bound by the Donor Bill of Rights, and do not prey on unwilling or unwitting victims.

The Internet and social media, along with the popularity of vampires in pop culture, have allowed modern-day vampires to socialize and form communities of support. Still these communities may not win the approval of mainstream society,

But through its growth, at least one thing has stayed the same for the real vampires community: the stigma. Even in an era that has embraced previously fringe identities at face

value, a taste for human blood remains a difficult practice to accept, especially because almost no one has found any real basis for the condition. But in fact, vampires are a proud, living critique of normalcy – which is, perhaps the thing about them that frightens people the most.⁵

There have been frightening vampires that have turned normalcy upside down in terrifying ways. In 1867 James Brown, a Portuguese sailor, signed on to a fishing boat out of Boston, bound up the coast of New England. Sometime on the voyage, two of the crew went missing. When the captain searched for the men, he found Brown in the hold, sucking the blood out of one of the dead men. The other lay dead, the blood already drained from his body. Brown was arrested, and charged with the two crimes of murder and vampirism. Convicted of murder, he was sentenced to hang, but his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment by President Andrew Johnson. After fifteen years in a Massachusetts prison, Brown was shipped to a prison in Ohio, where, shortly thereafter, he murdered two other men. Finally sent to the National Asylum – the *New York Times* for 4 November 1892 said he ‘fought like a tiger against being removed’ – the vampire Brown was confined to a padded cell, where he remained until his death.

On a walking tour of France in 1897, Joseph Vacher decided to broaden his culinary taste by killing at least a dozen people and drinking their blood through bites in their necks. A couple of decades later, sometime around 1916, word came to the little village of Czinkota in Hungary that a favourite son, Bela Kiss, had been killed in the First World War. As neighbours went through his home and personal effects, an unusual disturbance in the ground caught the attention of one of them. The neighbours began digging through the field and uncovered the bodies of 31 people. Each person had been strangled. The corpses bore puncture wounds in their necks, and each had been drained of blood. Had Kiss risen from the grave as a vampire?

In the 1940s John George Haigh lured victims to his London home, where he killed them, draining their blood and drinking it, and then disposing of the bodies in a vat of sulphuric acid. In 1950, across

the Atlantic, sixteen-year-old Salvatore Agron, dressed like a Bela Lugosi-style vampire, committed several murders in New York City. Agron told the court he was a vampire, but the jury was unimpressed, and he was executed.

Richard Chase, of Sacramento, California, believed he could improve his physical health by killing small animals and drinking their blood. When that failed, he turned to humans, and in the 1970s went on a killing spree that took the lives of several people, whose blood he drank. Sentenced to death for his crimes, he cheated the executioner by committing suicide in prison.

James P. Riva claimed he met a vampire in Florida whose voice, for several years after, told him what to do. In 1982 the vampire voice apparently promised Riva eternal life if he killed his disabled grandmother and drank her blood. He stabbed and then shot her four times with gold-painted bullets recommended by the vampire, and then set fire to the house. At his trial, the self-proclaimed seven-hundred-year-old vampire said he had tried to suck her blood but failed because she was too old. He was sentenced to life imprisonment.

In 1992 Andrei Chikatilo confessed to killing 55 people in Rostov, Russia. As if killing them was not enough, Chikatilo also drank his victims' blood and ate their flesh. He was sentenced to death. This and the cases mentioned in this chapter are just a few of the chilling stories of people who have believed themselves to be vampires and committed horrific crimes because of their delusions.

Despite such repulsive stories, the vampire remains today a popular figure, although one markedly different from the figure of the past. Like werewolves, vampires are often depicted in books, movies and television programmes as beautiful and sexy creatures – male and female alike – and are often sophisticated and worldly, rich and powerful. They are appealing and glamorous and dispense with some of the old traditions: they do not sleep in coffins; daylight has no ill effect upon them; they are not afraid of crucifixes or silver; they *like* garlic; and some do not even drink blood from humans, but purchase animal blood. In fact, the modern vampire is not all that much different from you and me.

Fluid Shapeshifters: Sex, Gender and Identity

The famous Japanese actor Onoe Matsusuke inspects his image in the mirror. He has meticulously applied his *aiguma* make-up, and the face that peers back at him is that of a courtesan who has come to a bad end in the play *The Courtesan Asama Dake*. She is now a *yurei*, a ghost. Matsusuke leans forward to inspect his artistry; the face is white, the pallid colour of death, with indigo shading. Eyebrows are painted high on the forehead, and black circles surround the eyes, making them look huge and wild.

Satisfied with his new face, he stands and wraps a white kimono around himself, the traditional Japanese burial attire. Then he adds the final touch: a wig of long, flowing hair, which he knows will unleash his audience's chaetophobia (the fear of hair) and send them into paroxysms of fear. His bare feet are visible in the mirror, but he knows the artful arrangement of fire-pots, or lamps, on the stage will illuminate him only from the waist up, so he will appear to be a proper footless Japanese ghost, floating in the air.

Matsusuke silently makes his way to the wings of the stage, becoming more and more the dead courtesan with every step, as though she were now dwelling inside him and, who knows? Maybe she is.

In Japanese kabuki theatre, all roles are played by men, so the famed Matsusuke appearing as a woman or female ghost would come as no surprise to his nineteenth-century audience. Matsusuke was a

disciple of Onoe Kikugoro, who began his career as a *wakaonnagata*, a kabuki actor specializing in female roles; kabuki actors often played only one type of role – hero, villain, old man, woman and so on – their entire careers. Kikugoro eventually took on leading man roles, as did Matsusuke.

Shakespeare, too, sometimes used men, usually boys, to play the parts of women, but kabuki takes such role-playing to a deeper level. Kabuki has been an exclusively male domain for more than the last four hundred years, even though its earliest iteration was founded by a woman, Izumo no Okuni, in 1603; kabuki then was primarily dance, and it was rowdy and sexually suggestive, as the performers were often also prostitutes. As a result, female kabuki was banned by the emperor and had only all-male actors from 1629.

On stage, kabuki actors perform quick costume changes, becoming another character through the change, or depicting shifting emotions in the same character. The changes occur in seconds, with the aid of an on-stage assistant who surreptitiously removes the basting thread holding the two costumes together. So the kabuki actor is a shapeshifter on stage, but may also come to the stage having already made the transformation from a male to a female role, as did Matsusuke in the role of the courtesan's ghost – in effect, a double transformation.

Gender-shifting in the theatre is only one illustration of the possibility of a person changing his or her gender, a possibility that has stirred the imagination of humanity since earliest times. Previous chapters in this book have already mentioned the ancient Greek tale of Tiresias, who transforms from a man into a woman – becoming a wife and mother – before transforming back into a man several years later, and there are also Welsh and Norse tales of gender-shifters. But other examples of gender-shifting deities can be found in many cultures. They are common in Hindu and Japanese traditions, especially in Japanese stories about Inari, who sometimes appears as a young food goddess; at other times, an old man carrying rice; and still others, as an androgynous bodhisattva. The creator deity of Dahomey (modern-day Benin), Mawu-Lisa, comes into being from the merger of the twin brother-sister gods of the Moon and

Sun, Lisa and Mawu. Similar stories are told in Zambia and Ghana. Transgender or androgynous gods appear in Aborigine and Pacific Islander mythology.

Gender-shifting brings into focus the question of what constitutes a person's identity. Is it the outward appearance of a person that determines his gender, or is it something innate in our consciousness that informs us of our gender? This question has long been discussed by philosophers, psychologists and theologians, and one may question if an answer has yet been determined.

In John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), the philosopher looks for ways to define and understand human thought and consciousness. Locke argues that personal identity is not decided upon a physical basis – one's atoms – since we know those atoms all change over time and that we completely 'rebuild' our physical bodies many times over a lifetime, replacing dead cells with new ones. Rather, he says identity is decided upon the *arrangement* of those atoms, with each of us having a unique arrangement; Locke calls that arrangement 'soul', but it may also be considered our consciousness. His famous 'prince and the cobbler' example makes his point:

For should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler, as soon as deserted by his own soul, every one sees he would be the same person with the prince, accountable only for the prince's actions: but who would say it was the same man? The body too goes to the making the man, and would, I guess, to everybody determine the man in this case, wherein the soul, with all its princely thoughts about it, would not make another man: but he would be the same cobbler to every one besides himself. I know that, in the ordinary way of speaking, the same person, and the same man, stand for one and the same thing. And indeed every one will always have a liberty to speak as he pleases, and to apply what articulate sounds to what ideas he thinks fit, and change them as often as he pleases. But yet, when we will inquire

what makes the same spirit, man, or person, we must fix the ideas of spirit, man, or person in our minds; and having resolved with ourselves what we mean by them, it will not be hard to determine, in either of them, or the like, when it is the same, and when not.'

Essentially, Locke is saying that a person's identity – and here we will say his gender-identity – is not determined by society's judgement on how one looks or represents one's self but is determined by that individual's consciousness. This would seem a logical and rational conclusion, yet members of the LGBTQ community continually find their identities challenged by society.

But this has not always been the case in every society. Indeed, there are cultures in which people can live as members of the opposite sex without prejudice or judgement. Native American cultures have long familiarity with the *berdache* tradition, in which a morphologic male does not take on a male role, but rather, adopts that of a female, wearing female clothing, performing women's chores and sometimes marrying a man. It is important to note that, while a *berdache* assumed a gender role different from his morphologic gender, his sexual identity was not necessarily changed as well. About 150 Native American nations had the *berdache* tradition, with about thirty of them having women who took on the roles of men. *Berdaches* were regarded as 'two-spirit' people, a term meaning people of fluid gender identity that has been revived among contemporary Native Americans, and were, for the most part, perceived as valued and respected members of their community.

But not every culture appreciated gender-shifting people. The Aborigines of Australia tell of a tribe of *jandu* (women) who lived away from other traditional tribes and performed the roles of men. Rather than gather fruits and vegetables, as women were expected to do, the *jandu* carried men's weapons – spears with spear-throwers, and knives – and hunted kangaroos and emus, just like the men. Tchooroo, the Great Snake, who was responsible for upholding the laws of the tribes, chastised the women and ordered them to stop hunting, since they were violating the law by doing men's work. The women defied

him and continued to hunt for meat, so Tchooroo turned them all into giant termite nests.

While such gender-shifters are not magically transforming themselves in the traditional way we think shapeshifters do, they do represent an innate desire to take on a new gender – a new shape, but one of their own choosing. This desire in some individuals has been recognized for thousands of years and not always in a favourable light. Deuteronomy 22:5 reads, 'The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.'

Cross-dressing, in many societies – especially those founded in Judaeo-Christian belief traditions – has been considered immoral, if not illegal. One of the earliest anti-cross-dressing laws in the United States was instituted in Columbus, Ohio, in 1848 and forbade people from 'appearing in public in a dress not belonging to his or her own sex'. In the decades that followed, at least forty U.S. cities established anti-cross-dressing laws, but it soon became obvious that deciding upon and enforcing an appropriate dress code was difficult, and most of these laws were eventually repealed. Still, it was not until 1947 that Columbus repealed its law.

Surprisingly, the attitudes of colonial America were far different. 'Shape-shifters, Masqueraders, and Subversives: An Argument for the Liberation of Transgendered Individuals' (1997), written by the attorney Hasan Shafiqullah, relates an interesting legal case from Colonial Virginia in 1629. Thomasine Hall, born in England, spent her childhood dressed as a girl, but at the age of twelve she was sent to live with her aunt in London, who dressed her as a boy and called her Thomas. Thomasine served in the army for a few years as a man, but donned women's apparel after being discharged and worked subsequently at making bone lace and other needlework. At the age of twenty, Thomasine came to Virginia dressed as a man but regularly switched between male and female clothing. After a sexual encounter with a maid brought Thomasine before the authorities, a physical examination revealed inadequately developed male and female genitalia. The General Court of Virginia decided 'that hee is a man and a woeman' and ordered Thomasine to dress in men's clothing,

'only his head to bee attired in a Coyfe and Croscloth with an apron before him'.

Shafiqullah writes of this case that

Hall's case is significant in its revelation of the judicial system's initially fluid approach to the question of gender and sex. When confronted by an ambiguous person, the court declared her/him to be both woman and man, decreeing that s/he go about dressed in a mixture of masculine and feminine clothing. Unfortunately, this alternative seventeenth-century approach has not survived.²

The American Psychiatric Association has recently defined Gender Dysphoria Disturbance. A person may be diagnosed with gender dysphoria when he or she exhibits a strong and persistent cross-gender identification. A child is considered to have the disturbance if six or more symptoms are exhibited by the child for a period of six months. Some of these symptoms include a repeated desire to be, or an insistence that he or she is, the other sex; cross-dressing; at play, taking on roles usually associated with the opposite sex; a strong dislike of one's sexual anatomy; and preference for playmates of the opposite sex. In adults, the Gender Dysphoria Disturbance is manifested by the individual's stated desire to be the other sex; passing one's self off as the other sex; wishing to be treated and live as the other sex; and having the conviction that he or she has the typical feelings and reactions of the other sex.

In cultures holding rigid codes of gender identity and behaviour, people who are convinced their birth gender does not truly represent who they are may find it difficult to navigate their place in society and may suffer from anxiety, frustration, depression and even suicidal thoughts. Cultures that hold a more tolerant attitude towards gender – and sexuality – such as traditional Native American culture, may offer a model for successfully integrating people of mistaken gender into society.

Subjects of psychological studies or not, mistaken gender identities or not, the fact remains that such people have been with us since the

dawn of time and will continue to be with us. Transgender people who physically transition themselves through surgery and drug therapy into the sex other than that which they were assigned at birth undergo a form of shapeshifting. Given that some people are born into the wrong bodies, it is not such a stretch of the imagination to think that some people may, at times, harbour secret wishes to be someone else, perhaps even *something* else. We have all had the wish, even if only momentarily, to be someone or something other than what we are. That wish could be based on feelings of inferiority – we are not beautiful enough, smart enough, strong enough – and so we think that if only we were some other person, we would overcome that inferiority. It may be that we wish for another identity to indulge our baser natures freely, perhaps even to commit criminal acts. On the other hand, being able to transform into some pure and spiritual being, as may happen in meditation or religious ecstasy, could bring a positive influence into one's life. It may simply be curiosity that makes us wonder what it would be like not only to step into the shoes of another person, but to wear his or her identity like a new suit of clothes.

Whatever the reasons for desiring personal transformation, most of us realize that we do not have divine powers to bring this about, nor are we shamans capable of transforming ourselves. Yet we do manage temporarily to shapeshift, and we do that through masks, masquerades, costumes and cosplay. The purist who defines a shapeshifter as one who can voluntarily transform from man to animal while maintaining his human consciousness will argue that these things are not really shapeshifting. But one could also argue that these forms of shapeshifting are, of course, voluntary and maintain human consciousness. And while there may not be an actual bodily transformation, a person wearing a leopard costume, pretending to be a leopard, may be as much a shapeshifter as that prehistoric hunter wearing the hide of his prey, or that berserker wearing an animal pelt that would make him a fearsome warrior.

Masks have been around from the earliest times; the oldest extant mask was made of stone and dates to 7000 BC, although cave drawings in France dating back at least 35,000 years show human figures wearing masks during a hunt. In cultures all around the world, masks

were used in religious rituals, synthesizing the wearer with the gods, and in secular rituals as a symbol of the wearer's authority. In many indigenous cultures, shamans become healing spirits through masks. An excellent example is the False Face Society of the Iroquois Nation and its various masks of healing spirits. Masks not only mediate with healing spirits, but they engage with spirits in other ways, such as rites of passage; in rituals designed to ensure success with crops in agricultural communities; or to stave off earthquakes, volcanos, tsunamis and other natural disasters attributed to the wrath of the gods. Such rituals create a tradition that reassures and guides future generations of that culture, and they do so through the transformative powers of the human behind the mask of the supernatural.

Masks in various forms (sacred, practical, or playful) have played a crucial historical role in the development of understandings about 'what it means to be human,' because they permit the imaginative experience of 'what it is like' to be transformed into a different identity (or to affirm an existing social or spiritual identity).³

Earlier sections of this book discussed the dual nature of humans, the primal, animal side coexisting, sometimes uneasily, with a higher, more civilized side. The Australian biologist Jeremy Griffith provides a unique description of that dual nature:

There are two fundamental aspects to the human condition: the tragic repression of our original all-loving and all-sensitive instinctive self or soul, and the extremely angry state of the unjustly condemned conscious thinking egoic intellect. In the day to day lives of humans living under the duress of the human condition the truth of the extent to which our soul has been brutally repressed has been hidden from view. Similarly, the depth of the anger of our conscious mind has also been mostly restrained and contained and thus also not often revealed. We learnt to be, as we say, civilized; we tried not to let the true extent of our corrupted, upset state show.⁴



A sheep's-head mask, worn during harvest festival in Belarus.

Griffith says there are negative psychological and physical consequences for humanity in not recognizing and acknowledging our 'corrupted, upset state'. Catharsis is needed to heal that corrupted state.

The wearing of masks that revealed the true depth of how either soul-dead or ferociously angry we upset humans had become was a powerfully effective way of bringing some relieving, therapeutic honesty to our lives. It comes as little surprise then that masks have, in fact, been used in the ceremonies of almost all cultures.⁵

So even without physical transformation, masks can make an internal shapeshifter of sorts out of the wearer, one who is psychologically transformed by the mask, albeit for only a short time. In modern psychology, it is not uncommon to find masks used in drama therapy or psychotherapy, validating the notion that something transformative happens to one who wears the mask.

In drama, that transformation is evident both to the audience and to the performer behind the mask. Ancient Greek audience members understood the meaning behind masks of comedy and tragedy, and those symbols are still used today as traditional icons of theatre. The Noh theatre of Japan, a form of musical drama developed in the fourteenth century, relies on stylized masks informing the audience of the character's identity – a woman, a child, an old person, a ghost. Noh theatre also generally features a shapeshifter as a main character, usually a supernatural being who transforms into a human being, a hero who narrates the story; the actor's shapeshifting is signalled by changing masks.

It would seem inevitable that the wearing of masks, especially when worn in a playful, non-ritualistic manner, would evolve into masquerade involving a full costume, the masqueraders trying to transform completely, at least outwardly, into the being they are impersonating. There are references from antiquity of masked revellers in Greek Bacchanalia and Roman Saturnalia being given licence to 'act out' in improper, sometimes lewd, behaviour that would not be

tolerated at any other time. The masks allowed them to transform into characters atypical of their usual personalities and to indulge in the adopted characters' behaviours.

The first fully costumed masquerades were held in Venice in the thirteenth century during Carnival. That festival, which is still celebrated in various parts of the world and is also known as Mardi Gras, was a last chance for hedonistic pleasures before the austere and self-denying forty days of Lent. Costumed and masked revellers enjoyed anonymous equality in their disguises, no matter what rank they held in society. A commoner could mock a prince with impunity. A man could whisper something improper to a woman, or pinch her derrière, but she had the freedom to respond in kind. Particularly popular among the upper classes, these elaborate balls were widespread throughout Italy during the Renaissance and soon found their place in other European countries.

By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, masquerades were popular both in Europe and North America, although they were becoming controversial in Europe. There were stories of immoral behaviour and forbidden assignations among the masqueraders, who felt free to transform themselves into libertines, their true identities hidden behind masks. Any activity that breaks down barriers of class, gender and ethnicity by challenging social norms is sure to be seen as a threat to those in authority, and the eighteenth-century masquerades were no exception. In England, a strong and vocal opposition to masquerades grew. Prominent clergymen, pamphleteers, journalists and writers, such as Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding and Eliza Haywood, spoke out against the threat to English morals and culture the foreign-imported masquerades represented. Masquerades were considered dangerous for English women. Women were warned against attending them lest their virginal reputations be sullied. Female attendance at masquerades was considered heinous and a criminal offence, while the double standard of the times tolerated men going to them, although some ladies' periodicals castigated the men for doing so. In an issue of the *Female Spectator*, Eliza Haywood advised her female readers that 'women of honour' not only did not attend the masquerade but 'shunned the depraved gentlemen who

were so depraved as to offer them tickets'. She further advised male readers not to bring their wives or sisters to a masquerade where their mistresses might also be in attendance.

Spurred by anti-masquerade critics, the civil authorities made some effort to curb the revelries, although the few masquerades they broke up were mostly among the working class, rather than the upper class. Still, the anti-masquerade movement had its effect, and public gatherings were curtailed, although masquerades continued as private events among the elites.

The anti-masquerade movement in England demonstrates how powerful was the idea of shapeshifting. An entire society rose in opposition to the people – normally moral, law-abiding individuals – who, in costume, transformed into lewd, immoral hedonists:

Mask and costume, the signs of joyful exchange between self and other, had to be laid aside, and more sober pursuits embraced. By the end of the eighteenth century, this transvaluation of pleasure had in fact been achieved: pleasure resided no longer in a magical incorporation of the other, but in the sentimental objectification of the other.⁶

But masks, costumes, masquerades and costume parties did not fade away and in fact continue to this day. Halloween, long a tradition in the United States, after being imported by Irish and Scottish immigrants and adapted across the generations, is growing and spreading to other countries. More American dollars are spent on Halloween costumes and decorations in the United States than on any other holiday except Christmas – \$9.1 billion in 2017, according to the National Retail Federation.⁷ It seems that more and more people are becoming interested in transforming themselves through masks and costumes.

The epitome of such a transformation is cosplay, a performance art in which participants, called cosplayers, dress in the costumes of characters taken from manga and anime, comic books, cartoons, video games, movies and television. The term also refers to the broader subculture of cosplayers interacting with each other, or to any role-playing

costumed venue apart from the stage. Any entity that lends itself to dramatic interpretation can be a subject for cosplay, and gender-switching is a common element. Cosplayers are different from children merely trick-or-treating in Halloween costumes, or Mardi Gras partygoers. Cosplayers seek to take on the personas of their characters and so adopt the affectations, mannerisms and body language of the characters they portray while in costume. In effect, they *transform* into those characters.

Cosplay is extremely popular in Japan and other parts of Asia but has spread worldwide, and cosplay events are frequently offered at fan conventions, nicknamed 'cons'. Some of the events are huge: Comiket in Japan draws hundreds of thousands of anime and manga fans, and only slightly smaller crowds show up for Cosplay Mania in the Philippines and the EOV Cosplay Festival in Singapore. In the United States, the largest events are the San Diego Comic-Con, which began in 1970 with an attendance of 145 that soared to 167,000 in 2015, and New York Comic Con, which attracted over 185,000 fans in 2016. Florida Supercon in Fort Lauderdale is smaller than the San Diego or New York events, but at 53,000 people in 2017, it is still quite a gathering. In addition to the appearances of TV and movie stars such as Levar Burton, Lee Majors, Ralph Macchio and others, there are cosplay costume contests, cosplay wrestling, video and board games, scores of discussions on a variety of pop culture topics and hundreds of vendors selling everything from swords and tiaras to comic books and figurines. Not everyone who attends these events is a cosplayer, of course, but there are so many in costume that sometimes the person wearing street clothes seems the odd duck in the crowd.

There are two levels of cosplayers, the amateurs who wear costumes for fun, and the professionals, who earn a living as a cosplayer. There are several ways to make a living as a cosplayer. Most of the professionals sell pictures or calendars of themselves in costume through social media sites or at conventions. Many of them work as models for corporations. Some also sell products that they make for cosplayers, such as weapons, armour, wigs, clothes and other accessories. In fact, outfitting cosplayers is a big business. Japanese manufacturers of cosplay costumes reported a profit of ¥35 billion (\$310 million) in 2008.



Cosplayers at the Florida Supercon, 2017.

Amateur or professional, a key element in cosplay is attractiveness – that is, representing the character in the most attractive manner. Even a lizard-headed space alien can be attractive if the cosplayer has taken the proper care and diligence in rendering the costume as accurately as possible. But there is another element to cosplay: sex. Scantly clad women, and sometimes men, are common in cosplay, and some conventions have had to enact rules to make sure costumes do not cross the line of local obscenity standards. They are not usually found at conventions, but there are also nude cosplayers who ply their business on the Internet. One might argue that nudity is not a costume, but apparently the addition of a pink wig makes it cosplay. The anti-masquerade critics of the eighteenth century would be astounded by today's cosplayers.

So, why does one become a cosplayer? The answer is obvious for the professionals – money. But what about the many, many more cosplayers who are hobbyists, nor seeking to become professionals? At Supercon 2017, a woman clothed all in black robes, her face black as night and looking to all the world like anyone's worst nightmare, turned out to be a pleasant mother who was there with her two daughters and one of their friends, all of them in costume – although none as terrifying as the mother's. She portrayed The Beast from the TV cartoon *Over the Garden Wall*. She said that she found cosplay something she could do with her children. All year long, they worked

together on making costumes and props for their appearance at the convention. Their role consisted of nothing more complicated than walking around in costume and posing for photos when asked, the typical routine for amateurs. As much fun as she was having, The Beast mentioned to me that, 'The cosplay community is not the most wholesome group,' referring to some of the female costumes, or lack thereof, on display. 'I wouldn't want my girls to walk around like that,' she said.

At the other end of the spectrum, a trio from the South Florida Pirates, lavishly dressed in 1891 Victorian steampunk outfits instead of their usual pirate garb, said they do a lot of charity work, visiting hospitals and attending charity benefits in costume. A group of four twenty-somethings said cosplay gave them something to do as a group, and they enjoyed making their costumes and entering costume contests. For them, cosplay was all about 'having fun and just hanging out'.

Clearly, there is a fun element in cosplay, but there is also a more serious aspect to it. Cosplayers choose the characters they recreate for a specific reason, even if that reason is a subconscious one – the masks and costumes they choose say something about their own shortcomings or desires, their wishes to be someone else. It is an individual choice, but it serves some psychological need of that person. Think of it as masked therapy, perhaps.

This also applies to Halloween costumes. A youngster might say he wants to dress as one of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles because they are 'cool', but there is something more definable, but unspoken, beneath that 'cool'. Adults in costume may give more thought to their choices, and those choices may reveal something about their true nature. It is a bit of a stereotype, but the mousy librarian that appears at a Halloween party as a sexy Wonder Woman may be enacting a wish to be something she is not in reality.

The origins of modern-day Halloween come primarily from the Celtic tradition, although there is some connection as well to the Roman feast of Pomona, the goddess of fruits and seeds, and to the festival of the dead called Parentalia. For the Celts, Samhain marked the end of the harvest and the beginning of winter, the 'dark days'. They believed that on Samhain, the veil between the living and

the dead, the supernatural world, was at its thinnest and that spirits roamed among the people, causing mischief. They needed to be propitiated with offerings of food and drink, lest they cause damage to the crops and livestock. On that night, traditionally 31 October, it was also the souls of the dead that returned to visit their homes, seeking that same hospitality from their loved ones. That ancient tradition of leaving out food and drink for the dead is found throughout the world, as in the Hungry Ghost Festival in various Asian countries, and *Día de los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead, celebrated in Mexico and Hispanic communities in the Americas.

But not all supernatural beings stalking the dark Samhain night were viewed as benign family pranksters. Some of them were more sinister, with evil intent. People took to wearing masks and costumes that night to avoid being recognized by those dark spirits. The costumes and masks were often based on the people's notions of what evil spirits looked like, the belief being that by looking like one of the dead souls, the living would, in fact, avoid harassment by them. This is an interesting twist on shapeshifting. Outwardly, the masks and costumes invoke the presence of a dead soul, but the intention of the wearer is not to become a dead soul, but to stay safe from one, a disguise to confound the spirits.

It is doubtful the young trick-or-treaters of today, dressed as Spiderman, Pokémon, Bart Simpson, Donald Trump or some other pop-culture figure, know the true purpose of disguising oneself on Halloween. For them, it is all about the sweets and candy. But perhaps those that don more traditional costumes, such as ghosts, witches, vampires, werewolves and other supernatural entities, fully understand what the costumes are all about and are taking no chances with the spirits of the night on Halloween.

Shapeshifting through masks and costumes provides a safe outlet for hidden desires or wishes to be expressed. The person in costume knows the transformation is not permanent, but for a little while he or she can revel in being another person entirely.

Shapeshifters in Popular Culture: Literature and the Media

One morning, when Gregor Samsa woke from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin. He lay on his armour-like back, and if he lifted his head a little he could see his brown belly, slightly domed and divided by arches into stiff sections. The bedding was hardly able to cover it and seemed ready to slide off any moment. His many legs, pitifully thin compared with the size of the rest of him, waved about helplessly as he looked.

Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* (1915)

Going to bed as a human and waking to find oneself transformed into 'a horrible vermin' would be a nightmarish experience that would drive any of us instantly stark, raving mad. Yet Gregor Samsa surveys his new form with the utmost calm, his concerns being astonishingly mundane: will he make the train on time for his business trip? More importantly, will he have time to eat his breakfast? While he does ask, 'What's happened to me?', he poses the question casually, his attention focused on how he can continue in his quotidian routine, even though he is now a gigantic insect.

Gregor's transformation into an insect is not voluntary, nor does Franz Kafka give us any indication as to how it happened, or why; it simply happened. Shapeshifters in literature generally transform either through their own magical abilities, as in the case of wizards, witches and shamans, or they are transformed by a curse or some transgression they have committed. The 'out-of-the-blue'

transformation Gregor Samsa experiences is rare in literature and an interesting contradiction of Kafka's thoughts on existentialism, which is all about personal agency and embraces choice, free will, liberty and truth. Samsa's whole life, as detailed in the story, has been decided and directed by others; he may as well be an insect.

In opposition to Gregor Samsa's lack of personal agency is Dr Henry Jekyll's willingness to embrace the evil and immoral side of his character when he shapeshifts through a pharmaceutical concoction into Mr Hyde. In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Robert Louis Stevenson gives voice to Dr Jekyll, explaining why he sought to become an evil shapeshifter:

Even at that time, I had not conquered my aversions to the dryness of a life of study. I would still be merrily disposed at times; and as my pleasures were (to say the least) undignified, and I was not only well known and highly considered, but growing towards the elderly man, this incoherency of my life was daily growing more unwelcome. It was on this side that my new power tempted me until I fell in slavery. I had but to drink the cup, to doff at once the body of the noted professor, and to assume, like a thick cloak, that of Edward Hyde.

At first apprehensive, Jekyll soon gives in entirely to his shape-shifted monster, Mr Hyde. All respectability and all morality is lost to him in that form. As he says,

Men have before hired bravos to transact their crimes, while their own person and reputation sat under shelter. I was the first that ever did so for his pleasures. I was the first that could plod in the public eye with a load of genial respectability, and in a moment, like a schoolboy, strip off these lendings and spring headlong into the sea of liberty. But for me, in my impenetrable mantle, the safety was complete. Think of it – I did not even exist! Let me but escape into my laboratory door, give me but a second or two to mix and swallow the draught that I had always standing ready; and whatever

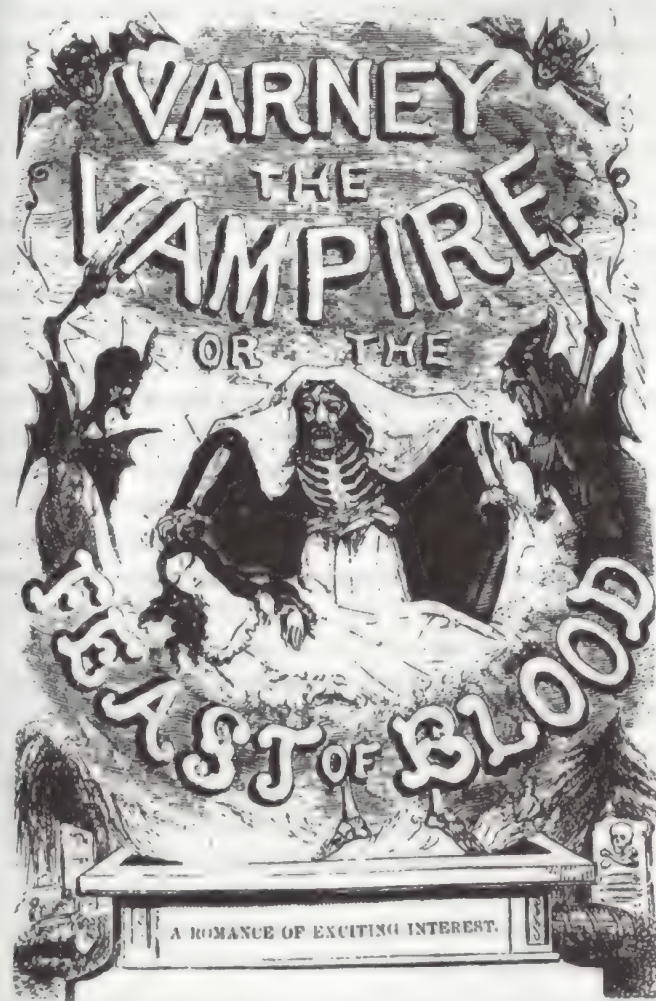
he had done, Edward Hyde would pass away like the stain of breath upon a mirror; and there in his stead, quietly at home, trimming the midnight lamp in his study, a man who could afford to laugh at suspicion, would be Henry Jekyll.'

Jekyll's motivation to transform into Hyde rests squarely on the dual nature we all harbour within – the higher, noble and moral self, and the base, amoral and animal nature. It is only the legal and moral restrictions society puts upon us, and for the good order of society most of us mutually pledge to uphold, that keep us from running naked through the woods, howling at the moon. But, as Jekyll notes, there is a temptation to shuck the trappings of civilization and to indulge in bad behaviour. And if one could do so with complete immunity, as Jekyll believes he has in his respected form as a doctor and pillar of his community, would not more of us go the way of Mr Hyde? That's a thorny moral question, one that we fear consciously to entertain, and so it is an important one to be raised in literature that features shapeshifters, a safe outlet for such a discussion.

Novelist Anne Rice's famous vampire Lestat is completely uninhibited in his vampiric life, as are the vampire antagonists in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series. They are glamorous, rich, sexy and indulgent in their passions and desires to excess. Lestat does express some remorse for needing to kill so that he can retain his immortality, but he does not change his ways. The more modern, good-natured vampires of *Twilight* have even got around that murderous little problem by buying blood, or using animal blood or voluntary human donors. These books say, all in all, that being a vampire is not such a bad un-life. This is quite a switch from the classical notions about vampires.

Consider Jonathan Harker's description of Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*:

His face was a strong, a very strong, aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils, with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very



The cover of Thomas Preskett Prest and James Malcolm Rymer's novella *Varney the Vampire* (1847).

massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth.

These protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale, and at the tops extremely pointed. The chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor.²

Of course, there would be 'extraordinary pallor': Harker was looking at a reanimated corpse! He goes on to describe the Count's hands: coarse and hairy, with hairs growing from the palms, the 'nails long and fine, and cut to a sharp point'. More than any other feature, it is Dracula's hands that most repulse Harker. He shudders when the Count's fingers brush his, and he becomes nauseated.

This same hideous type of vampire could be found in literature even before *Dracula*. Thomas Prekett Prest and James Malcolm Rymer's 1847 romance *Varney the Vampyre; or, The Feast of Blood* contains this description of the eponymous vampire as he inches closer to the bed of a terrified young woman, having just broken through the window of her bedroom:

The figure turns half round, and the light falls upon the face. It is perfectly white – perfectly bloodless. The eyes look like polished tin; the lips are drawn back, and the principal feature next to those dreadful eyes is the teeth – the fearful looking teeth – projecting like those of some wild animal, hideously, glaringly white, and fang-like. It approaches the bed with a strange, gliding movement. It clashes together the long nails that literally appear to hang from the finger ends.³

This description of Varney the vampire occurs in the first few pages, in which a storm rages outside while the vampire enters the bedroom through the window. The nameless girl is awake but seemingly in a trance that paralyses her limbs and her voice so that she can only watch in terror as the monster slowly approaches. There is much attention paid to the helpless girl's 'beautifully rounded limbs', her 'streaming hair' and her 'heaving bosom', all of which was steamy

literature for the time. She is unable to escape the clutches of the vampire and becomes his prey: 'The girl has swooned, and the vampire is at his hideous repast!'

The conclusion of that opening scene is erotically charged, as we read of the bedclothes falling from the bed; of the girl's long hair streaming across the bed; of the vampire seizing her long tresses and twining them around his bony hands as he holds her to the bed; and of those 'beautifully rounded limbs' quivering, as the vampire forces her head back by the hair and sinks his long fangs into her exposed neck. The scene is a metaphor for sexual intercourse, and later in the book as well as in *Dracula* there are strong suggestions that intercourse occurs between vampires and their female victims, although it occurs off the page. But there is more: the use of force on unwilling victims is nothing less than rape.

That theme is not a new one among shapeshifters in literature. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* recounts scores of stories in which gods, frequently Zeus, shapeshift into various animal forms to ravish unwilling women.

It was not only heterosexual eroticism featured in some of the early vampire stories. Lesbianism was first introduced in the genre of vampire stories by J. Sheridan Le Fanu in his 1872 novella *Carmilla*. The attraction between the Countess Karnstein Carmilla – who is, in reality, an ancient vampire named Mircalla – and the innocent young Laura contains undisguised elements of lesbianism:

Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardor of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet over-powering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips traveled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, 'You are mine, you shall be mine, you and I are one for ever.'⁴

Laura is clearly confused and troubled by her feelings of desire and revulsion regarding Carmilla. In the Victorian era in which Le Fanu was writing, such feelings would not have been voiced in public, if even acknowledged, and women who did have those feelings would most likely have felt isolated. While *Carmilla* was not written as a social treatise on women's sexuality, it might have given some comfort to women of the time who were grappling with that issue. At the least, *Carmilla* set the stage for the rash of lesbian vampires that would occur years later in books and films.

So shapeshifters in literature, especially vampires, sometimes have the role of shining a light on sexual mores or taboos. They do this not so much in the context of social criticism, although such criticism may be implicit, but rather as a way of explaining why and how we live our sexual lives. Their fluid natures allow for flexibility in sexual roles and may encourage sexual exploration. Lest we drift too far into this libidinous sea, we should look at other themes in literature the shapeshifter represents.

Psychologists tell us that when we meet someone new, no matter how objective we may believe ourselves, within just a few seconds we have made some observation about that person, and that observation is based on what we think about the person's appearance. Some studies show that tall people are promoted more often in the workplace than short people, while overweight people are promoted less than their thinner co-workers. Of course, these preferences are superficial and arbitrary and have nothing to do with the person's job performance. But we do make some assumptions about a person based on his height and weight, the colour of his hair or eyes, how he walks and moves, how he speaks, the clothes he wears and a million other random bits of information streaming into our subconscious minds. Why do we do this?

One theory is that we do it to survive – or at least, that was the original intention of the thought process. Our primitive ancestors had to be able instantly to determine friend from foe, family from 'other' and danger from safety, and to do that, their brains learned quickly to categorize sensory input to create 'types'. They then learned appropriate responses for each type. Our brains still work that way.



The frog prince trying to convince the princess to take him home with her in return for retrieving her golden ball from the pond.

We make conclusions about people that are, in large part, based upon first impressions.

Shapeshifters in literature play with the idea of first impressions. In the Brothers Grimm story 'The Frog Prince', a beautiful princess loses her golden ball in a pond. It is retrieved by a 'nasty' frog in exchange for her promise to let him come home with her, eat from her plate and sleep on her bed. The princess finds the frog repugnant, but, believing he could never get to her palace to redeem her promise, she lets him return the ball to her.

The princess runs off to the palace, leaving the poor frog in the pond, despite his calling out to her to take him home. But that

evening, there is a knock on the castle door; the frog has found his way to the palace. The princess wants nothing to do with the warty, slimy frog, but her father, the king, tells her she must keep her promise. The frog eats dinner from her plate and sleeps on her pillow, leaving at first light. To the princess's dismay, the frog returns to the castle two more nights, repeating the routine, but on the morning after the third night, the princess awakens to find a handsome prince standing at the foot of her bed. The prince explains that an evil fairy had transformed him into an ugly frog, but her love for him broke the spell, restoring him to his human form. Of course, they marry and live happily ever after.

The shapeshifting frog confounded the princess. There was no category in her brain into which she could place such a creature. There was a place for 'frog', and there was another for 'prince', both based on prior observations and experiences, but there was no place for 'frog-prince'. There is a moral here: there is value in trying to look beneath outward appearances, and doing so may reveal a handsome prince.

Literary shapeshifters challenge other characters and, by extension, the reader to examine their personal biases based on appearance. The outcome of seeing beyond the outward appearance may not always result in a handsome prince. It is quite possible that a beautiful woman like Carmilla may suck your blood, or that nice Dr Jekyll may beat you to death with his cane. But that is the challenge the shapeshifter offers, asking us to move beyond personally created stereotypes to see its true inner nature, whether it be good or bad.

Sometimes literary shapeshifters find that *they* are the ones being challenged by their transformations. This is usually the case in stories where the protagonist is unwillingly transformed by evil persons or curses, as in the case of 'The Frog Prince'; a little known fact about that Brothers Grimm story is that in the original version, the prince was not restored to his natural self by the kiss of the princess, but by her hurling the frog against a wall, the impact apparently knocking him out of his animal form. In *The Witches* (1983), Roald Dahl wrote of a boy transformed by a witch into a mouse, while a man is transported to a fantasy world and transformed into a dragon in Gordon R. Dickson's *The Dragon and the George*. What new obstacles

face such characters in their transformed state, and how will they overcome them?

In these kinds of stories, the obstacles the shapeshifted character encounters are vastly different from those encountered in the character's normal existence. They are unexpected and truly complicated, as the transformed character has no frame of reference from the real world to deal with the obstacles in the new world. How does a young boy ever prepare for the fantastic notion that he must evade mousetraps, or that his mouse tail will be cut off by a cook, as happens to the protagonist in *The Witches*? Gregor Samsa simply tries to ignore the fact that he is now a giant insect, which ultimately leads to his death.

These obstacles and conflicts test the mettle, the wisdom and the strength of the transformed protagonist, and to overcome them he must first understand the nature of the obstacle or conflict, as well as his own transformed self. Then he must creatively find ways to triumph over them. Deep thinking and creativity are called for if the protagonist ever hopes to win out over the obstacle and return to his normal self. By extension, the reader follows along as the protagonist figures a way out of his dilemma. The protagonist's dilemma could be seen as a metaphor for problems the reader is facing in his life and the deep thinking and creativity necessary for the protagonist to win may, on a subconscious level, help the reader overcome *his* problems.

Is this asking too much of literature? Clearly, there is power in story and power in *all* characters' ability to influence our thoughts, emotions and actions, whether they are shapeshifters or not. The power of transformation is a potent tool for those bent on evil, as in the case of Dr Jekyll. In the Brothers Grimm fairy tale 'Six Swans', a wicked stepmother – a common villainess in Grimm fairy tales – throws magic shirts over her six stepchildren, turning them into swans. Sometimes the power of transformation arises spontaneously and unbidden. In 'Twelve Brothers', also a Grimm fairy tale, a girl wishes she could change her twelve irritating and layabout brothers into ravens. No sooner does that thought cross her mind than she sees twelve ravens fly off into the sky, her brothers gone forever.

Literary shapeshifters are not always transformed against their will, of course. Many have the ability to transform themselves at will. Good examples of such shapeshifters are found in two contemporary book series, Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files* and George R. R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* – traditional werewolves exist in the former, while in the latter Martin's wargs are those who can project their minds into any animal. Other such examples could include Beorn, from J.R.R. Tolkien's classic story *The Hobbit* (1937), who could transform himself into a bear, or Urus in Dennis L. McKiernan's *The Eye of the Hunter* (1992), another were-bear, but whose transformation back to his human form is never guaranteed. Because these shapeshifters are in complete control of their transformations, the shapeshifting itself offers the reader more of a mechanical, but interesting, device to move the plot along, rather than a psychological examination of obstacles and conflict.

An interesting element to study in shapeshifter stories is how other characters view the shapeshifter. How do they feel about him if the transformation is caused by a curse? Is the shapeshifter then reviled by the others? Pitied? Do the shapeshifter's animal transformations disgust them? If the transformations are voluntary, do the others fear, respect or perhaps even worship the shapeshifter? Can the other characters trust a shapeshifter? After all, by its very nature, a shapeshifter is, at least, two-faced. Which is the true, trustworthy manifestation?

In Stephen King's *It*, a creepy, malevolent clown named Pennywise, a monster simply called It, wreaks havoc in the small New England town of Derry, Maine. As if the scary clown persona was not bad enough, It is in fact an alien shapeshifter that came to Earth on an asteroid millions of years ago. Every 27 years, It rises from sleep to feed on children, whose fears it can easily transform into physical reality. The monster loves to terrorize its victims by confronting them in the form of the thing that scares them the most. To various eleven-year-old members of the Losers Club, It shape-shifts as a mummy, a leper, a ghost, a werewolf, a fountain of blood spurting from a bathroom sink and two drowned boys. With each transformation, the child witnessing it is forced to face deep

psychological issues and to ask himself some of the questions above. Pennywise is not a psychotherapist with good intentions of helping the children. It is an alien shapeshifter of pure evil, using fear as a murderous weapon.

And what better way to approach a child than in the guise of a clown? Children have a visceral reaction to clowns. The littlest ones may be terrorized by them, but the older ones are intrigued by clowns, if not completely bedazzled by them. Here is how Pennywise appears to Georgie in King's novel:

'Want your boat, Georgie?' Pennywise asked. 'I only repeat myself because you really do not seem that eager.' He held it up, smiling. He was wearing a baggy silk suit with great big orange buttons. A bright tie, electric-blue, flopped down his front, and on his hands were big white gloves, like the kind Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck always wore.⁵

When it comes to shapeshifters, looks are deceiving. Pennywise seems like a nice enough clown, right up to the moment when he rips off Georgie's arm. Pennywise as a shapeshifter teaches the children in the Losers Club about trust, about confronting their fears, about uniting and working together against forces threatening society, and about understanding one's nature – what one believes, what one is willing to fight for.

Shapeshifters abound in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. In their third-year Transfiguration class, student wizards at Hogwarts learned how to become Animagi, that is, wizards – witches, too – who can transform themselves into animals. It was an arduous process and sometimes backfired, creating half-human, half-animal beasts unable to revert to their human forms. Although Animagi could transform at will, they could only transform into one specific animal that was determined by their inner personalities.

In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (published as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in the U.S.), Professor McGonagall transforms her desk into a pig on the first day of her Transfiguration class, amazing the students:

They were all very impressed and couldn't wait to get started, but soon realized they weren't going to be changing the furniture into animals for a long time. After taking a lot of complicated notes, they were each given a match and started trying to turn it into a needle.⁶

Some Hogwarts students do not have to bother with a Transfiguration class because they are Metamorphmagi, natural-born shapeshifters. They can transform into any animal or person they desire, or can simply alter parts of their appearance, such as changing hair colour, giving themselves a longer nose and so forth. These creatures are rare and extremely powerful, and, unlike Animagi, their shapeshifting talents can never be learned since they are hereditary. In that regard, Metamorphagi are similar to the ancient shapeshifting gods, with unbridled powers of transformation.

Readers of the *Harry Potter* books are asked simply to believe in a world where all kinds of shapeshifters exist, and the enormous popularity of the books is proof that readers do willingly suspend their disbelief for the sake of the story. Shapeshifting becomes a normal part of their world, at least temporarily.

Author Marisa Silver asks her readers for that same acceptance – to suspend their disbelief – in her 2016 novel *Little Nothing*. The novel opens with the birth of Pavla to elderly parents. Poor Pavla is born a dwarf, but her parents, at first repulsed, come to love her. In her teen years, her parents subject her to a cruel stretching device developed by a quack doctor, in a misguided attempt to make her taller. Incredibly, the device works, but Pavla inexplicably becomes a wolf-girl and ends up as a freak under the doctor's control, and joins a travelling carnival. She becomes quite the sensation:

It doesn't hurt that, along with her awful yet stunning transformation, Pavla's body has filled out in the highly appealing manner of a virgin on the cusp. Her bust is of a pleasing roundness, her narrow waist flares at the hips, and even though her face has lost its former beauty (and Smetanka [the doctor] had noticed what a pretty little dwarf she was when the old

couple brought her in) and she now looks out at the world through those eerie, yellow eyes, and though the palest russet down covers her cheeks and the shape of her face is dominated by an elongated nose that could reasonably be likened to a snout, she carries her now tall body with the candid informality of a girl who has not yet been split in two by a man.⁷

Pavla transforms fully into a wolf and, after attacking and devouring Smetanka, runs off with a wolf pack, living a lupine life, even to the point of having a litter of pups. Her next transformation finds her an inmate in a woman's prison, found guilty of killing her parents, although she was innocent. Like an amnesiac, Pavla has only fleeting images of her past lives and does not know who she is. Placed in solitary confinement, Pavla goes on a hunger strike and, after some time passes, simply vanishes from her cell. The reader never sees her again and the novel comes to a close shortly after.

Silver never shows the reader any of Pavla's transformations as they occur. One day Pavla is a dwarf, the next a wolf-girl, the next a wolf, the next a prisoner and the next disappeared. Unlike the intentional shapeshifter, Pavla does not retain her human consciousness, except in elusive bits and pieces and, for the most part, embraces the consciousness of each new form. In each transformation, there are new circumstances and new challenges she must navigate.

Because they can easily and often change appearance, emotional states and behaviour, shapeshifters bring tension and uncertainty into a story. Other characters, and the reader, never quite know what to make of the shapeshifter. They bring questions of faithfulness, love and betrayal into the lives of the characters. They 'trouble' the narrative – that is, they introduce a wild card element into the story, creating problematic repercussions for other characters and sometimes the shapeshifter itself. But shapeshifters are also, by their nature, highly adaptive and creative problem-solvers and offer new ways out of problems.

Frequently a shapeshifter's transformation is more about self-discovery and examination than it is about solving external problems. Shapeshifting may represent the repressed desire of the protagonist to

be something 'other', to explore that individual's restrained energies – good or bad – or sometimes to gain a better understanding of the opposite sex. Gender-shapeshifting protagonists are not uncommon in literature, movies and games. One Japanese tale from the *Inga Monogatari* (Tales of Cause and Effect), attributed to the monk Suzuki Shōsan and published in 1600, tells of a young priest who wakes up one morning – not unlike Gregor Samsa – to find his penis has fallen off. And like Samsa, the priest takes his new condition in his stride, becoming a woman and even giving birth to two children. She begins a new career as a wine merchant. Interestingly the tale contains no obvious moral, nor is it written merely as sensationalist literature. It is as though Shōsan is telling the reader that such things happen, that you may wake up one morning a different gender, but you should go on as though nothing has changed for you. And maybe Shōsan is right – you are who you are. This is what shapeshifters in literature do for us; they give us many perspectives to problems that may be worrying us, while at the same time, they give us a deeper understanding of the 'other', no matter how broadly that term is defined, and by doing so, ultimately help us to find common ground and unite in our true humanity.

From literature, the shapeshifter archetype found its way into television and movies. F. W. Murnau's 1922 film *Nosferatu*, starring Max Schreck in the role of the vampire, Count Orlok, brought sheer terror to its viewers. Based on Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, Murnau's silent movie was the first visual impression of a vampire on film and set the stage for the hundreds of vampire films and television shows that would follow and that continue to this day. Unfortunately for Prana Film, the German studio that produced *Nosferatu*, copyright infringement lawsuits brought by Stoker's descendants forced it to declare bankruptcy and close after only a few years.

But the genie was out of the bottle. Once audiences had got a good look at a vampire in the flesh, so to speak, and had experienced the delightful sensation of being scared witless in the dark, only to have that fear evaporate once the houselights were turned up, nothing would slake their appetite for more. Film studios were only too happy to oblige. Shapeshifter movies, especially those about vampires



Bela Lugosi as Count Dracula. Lugosi was so immersed in his role as Dracula, starring in several movies, that when he died, he was buried in his full Dracula regalia.

and werewolves, flooded theatres around the world and made actors Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney, Jr, John Carradine, Vincent Price, Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee and scream-queens such as Barbara Shelley, Veronica Carlson and Jamie Lee Curtis into international film stars.

In the filmography section in *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead* (1994), author J. Gordon Melton lists every vampire film made from 1910 to 1993 – a grand total of 618 films. These films were solely about vampires and did not feature other types of shapeshifters,

nor did they account for the scores of vampire movies that have been made since 1993, or the numerous television shows featuring vampires. Melton also lists 96 vampire plays and eight operas during the same period. Brad Steiger lists 69 werewolf and shapeshifter films in his *The Werewolf Book: An Encyclopedia of Shape-shifting Beings* (1999). His filmography begins with a 1908 film adaptation of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and lists movies through 1998.

Just as vampire novels, from the earliest to contemporary stories, contain sexual themes generally involving a lovely lady under the hypnotic sway of an evil vampire, so too do shapeshifter movies. Early films, like the early novels, hinted at sex but were never explicit about it, letting the audience use their imaginations to fill in the blanks. But as time went on and social standards about sex became more liberal, the films became more risqué in their treatment of it.

Hammer Productions, a British film and television company founded in 1934, jumped into the horror film milieu in a big way, especially with a series of vampire movies, loosely based on *Dracula*; other Hammer films featured a variety of shapeshifting creatures. From the 1950s to the 1970s, Hammer became one of the most successful producers of horror films, partly because of an agreement with Universal International, giving Hammer access to many of Universal's stars. But the real reason for their success was their unflinching attitude towards sex and gore on the silver screen. Hammer operated under the principle 'the more the merrier'. Hammer films were instantly recognizable by their bevy of busty beauties and bountiful buckets of blood.

In those days, Hammer voluntarily submitted scripts to the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) for its comments before production. In 1957 Hammer submitted to the BBFC the script for *Dracula*, written by Jimmy Sangster. They received this reply from BBFC reviewer Audrey Field:

The uncouth, uneducated, disgusting and vulgar style of Mr Jimmy Sangster cannot quite obscure the remnants of a good horror story, though they do give one the gravest misgivings about treatment . . . The curse of this thing is the

Technicolor blood: why need vampires be messier eaters than anyone else? Certainly, strong cautions will be necessary on shots of blood. And of course, some of the stake-work is prohibitive.⁸

Despite the BBFC's misgivings, Hammer went forward with the film. It starred Peter Cushing as Van Helsing, and Christopher Lee as Count Dracula, and broke box office records in the UK and the U.S., and around the world. Sexy, bloody shapeshifting vampires were a hit. Following Hammer's success, international film-makers, especially in Italy, France and Mexico, created sexier, more violent vampire movies.

Oddly, relatively few *Dracula* movies depict his shapeshifting abilities. One that does so extensively is Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, released in 1992. In his version, the Count transforms from an old and decrepit man to a young and charismatic gentleman. He also appears as a wolflike creature and is able to transmute himself into hundreds of rats, among other transformations.

Today's audiences are far more accepting of sex and violence in the movies and on TV, so the trend continues, with beautiful or handsome, sexy vampires and werewolves. *The Twilight Saga*, a series of five films based on Stephenie Meyer's books about vampires and werewolves, is a prime example. Other shapeshifters, such as Mystique, the seductive reptilian mutant in the *X-Men* movies, which are based on comic books, combine sex with physical transformation. Blue-skinned and yellow-eyed, in one scene, Mystique teases the hero Wolverine by transforming into several different women right before his eyes.

Modern special effects have given free rein to movie producers, allowing them to explore on film non-human – or at least, non-human-like – shapeshifters. The film *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) stars Robert Patrick as the liquid-metal T-1000. This advanced, shapeshifting Terminator can transform into any person it comes into contact with, can change its shape to fit through seemingly impermeable barriers, can flatten itself to blend into the floor or its surroundings, and can transform its arms into blades and piercing weapons. A murderous shapeshifting alien wreaks havoc on a

Norwegian Antarctic science outpost in *The Thing*, the 2011 prequel to the 1982 movie of the same name. In a theme as old as fairy tales, *The Thing* reminds viewers that people are not always what they seem and should not be easily trusted.

In a case of art imitating life, Paramount Pictures released a series of films based on a popular toy, Transformers, created by Hasbro Inc., a U.S. toymaker. Each Transformer toy appears to be a car, truck, aeroplane or some other vehicle, but is, in fact, a robot in disguise. With only a few simple moves, a child can manipulate the toy to turn it from a vehicle into a robot. The official Hasbro Transformer website describes them this way:

Transformers are living, human-like robots with the unique ability to turn into vehicles or beasts. The stories of their lives, their hopes, their struggles, and their triumphs are chronicled in epic sagas that span an immersive and exciting universe where everything is More Than Meets the Eye.⁹

In the Transformers world, the Autobots are the 'good guys', constantly warring against the Decepticons, the villainous robotic shapeshifters. Paramount released the first *Transformers* film in 2007. Four more followed, with *Transformers: The Last Knight* released in 2017. A sixth film, *Bumblebee*, was released in late 2018.

As impressive as Steiger and Melton's lists of shapeshifter films may be, they do not include the additional hundreds of animated films with shapeshifting characters. Many of these films are Disney productions. One of the earliest, *Fantasia*, produced in 1940, has a segment in which Mickey Mouse is a hapless sorcerer's apprentice who magically transforms a broom into an army of humanoid brooms toting buckets of water with disastrous results. Over the decades, shapeshifters have remained a popular subject for Disney studios. The animated film *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), based on T. H. White's novel of the same name, featured a shapeshifting duel between Merlin and a female wizard named Madam Mim. A crab, snake, rhinoceros and dragon are just some of the forms they take on in their duel. In 2017 Disney produced both the timeless shapeshifting story *Beauty*

and the Beast and *Moana*, which featured the Polynesian demigod Maui as a shapeshifter.

Many of the Disney animated films are adaptations of shape-shifting folklore or fairy tales, as in the case of *Beauty and the Beast*. Based loosely on the E. D. Baker novel *The Frog Princess* (2002), which itself was based on the Brothers Grimm fairy tale 'The Frog Prince', the 2009 Disney animated film *The Princess and the Frog* is set in 1920s New Orleans. It is a musical featuring a frog who was formerly a prince and a young African American waitress who kisses the frog-prince and becomes a frog.

Two animated films that have shapeshifters and narratives harkening back to old selkie stories are *The Little Mermaid* and *The Red Turtle*. Disney's 1989 version of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale invokes the ancient theme of a female water creature – in this case, a mermaid – falling in love with a mortal and transforming into a woman to be with her terrestrial love. Ariel, the mermaid, gives up her beautiful singing voice for legs. The film does end happily, of course, which is a departure from Andersen's fairy tale, in which the mermaid does not get the handsome prince.

The Red Turtle, by the Dutch animator Michael Dudok de Wit and Japanese producer Toshio Suzuki, tells the story of a nameless man stranded on an uninhabited island whose escape plans by raft are thwarted three times by a female red turtle. He unintentionally kills the turtle, but a woman emerges from its body. The two fall in love, have a son and live for many years on the island. When the son is grown, he swims away from the island with some turtles, seeking his destiny. The man grows old and dies. The woman grieves for him but then transforms again into a red turtle and slips back into the sea.

Japanese anime films often feature shapeshifters among their list of bizarre characters. The term 'anime' is a Japanese corruption of 'animation', but anime has come to be understood as a particular type of hand-drawn animation product developed in Japan and whose style originated in the 1960s with the works of Osamu Tazuka. An anime film is characterized by camera effects such as panning, zooming and angles, together with hand-drawn art. There are over 430 anime studios: Studio Ghibli, Gainax and Toei Animation are among

the largest. Hundreds of Japanese anime films and TV shows featuring shapeshifters have been produced over the last few decades, with new ones appearing almost daily.

Japanese anime has numerous genres. There is children's anime, called *kodomo*; boys' anime, called *shōnen*; anime for girls called *shōjo*; and a wide range of subjects for adults. There is even an adult subgenre called *hentai* – which translates into 'pervert' – that contains pornographic elements and is rated 'R18' in Japan.

Dragon Half began as a Japanese manga but was adapted as anime in 1993. (Manga are comics created in Japan that adhere to a style developed in that country in the late nineteenth century.) The story is about Mirk, a half-human, half-dragon teenage girl who is on a quest to obtain a magic potion that will transform her into a fully human girl, so she can win the love of the legendary dragon-slayer Dick Saucer.

In the anime TV series *Sorcerous Stabber Orphen*, which also originated as manga but was then produced for television in 1998, the sorcerer Stephan is mortally wounded in battle, forcing him to use his magical powers to heal himself. In the course of his healing, he makes other changes, transforming himself into the female Stephanie.

One of the greatest Japanese anime films of all time is *Spirited Away*. When it was released in 2001, the film received critical acclaim and grossed over \$289 million worldwide. Domestically, the film overtook *Titanic* and became the highest-grossing film in Japanese history, taking in ¥30.4 billion (\$270 million) total. While the film is not about shapeshifters per se, early in the film the heroine, a sullen ten-year-old girl named Chihiro Ogino, finds that her parents have been turned into pigs by a witch named Yubaba, and she must find a way to transform them back to their human natures. She is helped by a mysterious boy named Haku, who later transforms into a dragon and ultimately discovers his true nature, the spirit of the Kohaku River.

Television, too, has brought many programmes featuring shapeshifters to the attention of the viewing public. Some 1960s TV programmes featured vampires, such as Barnabas Collins in the soap opera *Dark Shadows*, and Grandpa in the comedy *The Munsters*. The latter also had a werewolf in the form of Eddie, Herman Munster's

son. In the 1970s, *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* featured all kinds of supernatural monsters, including vampires and werewolves, pitted against Carl Kolchak, a Chicago newspaper reporter with a penchant for the bizarre paranormal. The 1992 film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was followed several years later by a TV series of the same name, starring Sarah Michelle Gellar as Buffy. There is also an entity in *Buffy* called the First Evil, which is the embodiment of all evil in the universe. The First Evil is a shapeshifter that can transform into any person who has died, giving it almost infinite forms.

In 2007 *Moonlight* debuted on American television, dealing with the trials and tribulations of a community of modern vampires in Los Angeles. The 2008 HBO drama *True Blood*, based on the Southern Vampire Mysteries book series by Charlaine Harris, follows Sookie Stackhouse and her love affair with a 173-year-old vampire in a society where vampires drink synthetic blood and are openly accepted as part of the community, taking the vampire genre in a whole new direction. Another shapeshifter in *True Blood* is Sam Merlotte, who can transform into animals, a collie being his favourite form.

In 2017 Disney Junior broke new ground with its premiere of *Vampirina*, a computer-animated fantasy TV programme for children featuring a cute – and blue – female vampire named Vampirina 'Vee' Hauntley. Her family moves from Transylvania to Pennsylvania to open the Scared B&B for visiting ghosts, vampires, goblins and other paranormal guests. The programme is based on the popular *Vampirina Ballerina* books for children, written by Anne Marie Pace.

While these TV shows starred vampire or werewolf shapeshifters, there were many other varieties of shapeshifters available to viewers. The long-running 1960s comedy *Bewitched* featured a witch named Samantha who is married to Darrin, a mortal. She tries her best to live like a mortal woman and not resort to witchcraft, but her magical family disapproves of her marriage and often interferes with her relationship. There is much shapeshifting in this programme, with poor Darrin generally the hapless victim being turned into assorted animals and other creatures until Samantha rescues him.

It is obvious from its title that *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* is all about shapeshifting. The programme first aired in 1993 with a

narrative about five teenagers who are given the ability to transform themselves into fighters with special skills to combat an evil alien sorceress named Rita Repulsa and her minions, who are bent on conquering Earth. The Power Rangers became an American pop culture phenomenon, generating toys, games, comic books, feature films and several years of television programmes.

In *The Secret World of Alex Mack*, an American television series that ran from 1994 to 1998, Alex is a typical teenager who undergoes some radical changes when a truck containing mysterious chemicals accidentally spills on her a substance known as GC 161. After the accident, Alex finds she can shoot electricity from her fingers, has the power of telekinesis and can transform into a mobile puddle of water.

In 1993 *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, sometimes simply called *DS9*, became the latest addition to the *Star Trek* canon and even ran concurrently first with *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and later with *Star Trek: Voyager*; the series ran for six years. Based on a space station, rather than a starship, *DS9* offered deeper psychological characterization and explored meaningful themes such as war and religion. Among the unusual aliens in the programme is Constable Odo, a Changeling – note the word lifted directly from fairy tales – who serves as the space station's security chief. He is a shapeshifter, capable of taking on any shape, although he generally prefers that of a humanoid male.

The wildly popular British science fiction programme *Doctor Who* first aired on the BBC in 1963 and ran until 1989. The programme was relaunched in 2005 and continues today. The premise is that a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey, going by the name 'the Doctor', comes to Earth in a stolen time machine, the TARDIS. He has various adventures as he and his human friends travel through time fighting injustice. While the Doctor is not a shapeshifter per se, he does have the ability to change sex and to regenerate his body when near death, changing his appearance and personal characteristics; Jodie Whittaker was the first female Doctor, as she took over the role after the 2017 Christmas special episode.

An empathic shapeshifter is the star of *The Incredible Hulk* television series, which ran on CBS from 1978 to 1982, and was based on a

popular Marvel comic book. Dr David Banner (Bruce in the original comics), played by Bill Bixby, experiments with gamma radiation with disastrous results. He finds that when he becomes enraged, he transforms into The Hulk (played by Lou Ferrigno), a colossal mountain of angry green muscle. Empathic shapeshifters, such as Dr Banner, react to how they are treated by others. When they lose control over their emotions, they involuntarily shapeshift. Many people struggle to control their anger, jealousy, fear, stress and so on, and this trope serves as a reminder to them of the consequences of losing control.

A cuter, and much less angry, shapeshifter is the children's cartoon character Morphle, star of *My Magic Pet Morphle*, a YouTube Original Kids' Series created by Morphle TV. Morphle is a chubby red gumdrop-looking creature with big eyes and rabbit-like ears. His owner, a little girl named Mila, acquired Morphle at the Magic Pet Shop. Morphle can transform into any object or animal it wants and makes several transformations in each episode. In one episode, Mila also becomes a shapeshifter, but swears off shapeshifting after being temporarily stuck in the form of a huge dinosaur.

Shapeshifters continue to be of great interest to viewing audiences of both films and television. Obviously, there is something in the shapeshifter trope that speaks to us. Perhaps there is more than one thing. As already mentioned in the case of Mystique in the *X-Men*, shapeshifters are often portrayed as seducers. With the ability to transform into any person, a shapeshifter, male or female, can easily attain its heart's desire simply by becoming something *it is not*. In their disguises, shapeshifters are cautionary tales for those seeking relationships to look beyond superficial physical appearance to discover the real person inside. But conversely, shapeshifters as seducers may also represent a person's perverse desire to end a relationship for a more attractive or sexually appealing partner.

Shapeshifters should not be taken at 'face-value', since their very nature leaves their true face always in doubt. This is an obvious trope in the shapeshifter genre, whether in films, TV or literature. Since the earliest folk and fairy tales, the shapeshifter has always been a symbol of the mysterious stranger, and has been a useful tool to teach children and adults as well about 'stranger-danger'. Some

shapeshifters transform into older or younger versions of themselves, as does the astronaut Dave Bowman in 2010: *The Year We Make Contact*. This trope resonates with those who have a nostalgic yearning for their youth, or for those who can relate to the phrase, 'If I knew then what I know now', meaning their lives would have turned out much differently.

Many of the shapeshifter characters seen in films and on television were adapted from comic books, Japanese manga and graphic novels, although sometimes the reverse was true, with the films and tv shows spurring the printed material. The *X-Men*, as an example, developed by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, was originally published by Marvel Comics in 1963, eventually leading to several films, tv programmes, video games and action figures. On the other hand, the *Power Rangers* franchise began with the enormously popular television programme for children, with films, comics, toys and games following.

The manga genre has contributed a variety of bizarre shapeshifters to popular culture. One such manga series is *Blaster Knuckle*, first published in 1992 and serialized in the Japanese manga magazine *Young Animal*. It is set in America in the 1980s and pits the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) against African Americans. But in this version of the Klan, its members are not content with assaulting, killing and raping. They are flesh-eating shapeshifters who eat their African American victims. Only one man, an ex-heavyweight champion boxer named Victor Freeman, stands up to the shapeshifting KKK, armed with modified brass knuckles.

Klan, a 2010 Japanese manga, has nothing to do with the KKK but is all about four tribes of Eurasian people scattered throughout the world who can shapeshift into animals, in traditional shapeshifter fashion. Their prosperous existence is threatened by a British aristocrat who wants to bring all four tribes under his control; after all, he can transform into a lion, the king of beasts.

Gender-switching shapeshifters may be more common than ever in films and tv as society reappraises gender identity and sexuality issues. This trope may help to bring about greater acceptance of gender and sexuality variations and may give support to those individuals

who are dealing with such issues on a personal basis. A 2003 Taiwanese manga book called *Divine Melody* bases its storyline on *kitsune* lore and tells the story of a young female fox-demon who transforms into a male as she grows older. A similar gender-bender manga is *Tetsuwan Birdy*, in which an interplanetary police officer named Birdy Cephon accidentally kills an earthling. To make amends, she must carry his spirit within her body, which results in her revolving transformations from female to male. Yet another gender-bender manga book, published in 1988, is *Ranma ½*. The eponymous teenage hero of the book falls into a cursed pond and transforms into a girl every time water is splashed on him. As if that isn't enough, he is forced to deal with both male and female suitors and an arranged fiancée who says she does not even like him.

It should come as no surprise that shapeshifters should be so popular in visual genres such as films, tv programmes and comics, since visual depictions of them go back as far as prehistoric cave paintings. They have always been with us. Medieval illuminated manuscripts are full of shapeshifting creatures, usually represented as half-human and half-animal. The bizarre creatures found in the works of Hieronymus Bosch are notable examples. His triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, in the Museo del Prado in Madrid, is a fantastic conglomeration of transformed creatures.

The Museu do Azulejo in Lisbon, Portugal, contains a vast collection of famous Portuguese blue tiles. One large piece in the museum, made up of many painted tiles, depicts several birds, lions and dragons with human heads, surrounding a large head that is Janus-like, half-human and half-lion. In another Portuguese museum, the Serralves Museum in Porto, an exhibition of the Catalan painter Joan Miró's works, titled 'Materiality and Metamorphosis', opened in 2016. One of the paintings in the collection was titled *Shapeshifter*, although the entire collection reflected Miró's fascination with transformation. The exhibition catalogue reads,

Alongside his examination of materials, Miró developed an innovative language of visual signs that altered the course of modern art. In a process of morphological transformation,

objects in Miró's art achieve the status of visual signs: skeins of yarn in his weavings may function as surrogates for drips of paint; wire in his early collages often stands in for the drawn line; and paper at times recapitulates the physical characteristics of the canvas support. In the broadest terms, morphology is the operating principle of Miró's work: everything is in a state of constant flux and alteration as Miró explores equivalencies across media.

A 'state of constant flux and alteration' is what shapeshifters are all about, no matter the media in which they are presented. They keep us guessing, making us uncertain about what is real and what is not. They challenge all our assumptions about what we think we know and, like Buddhist monks, teach us that nothing is permanent. Everything is subject to change.

Final Transformation

In 2013 a conference titled 'Shapeshifters: Transformations, Hybridity and Identity' was held in Athens, Greece. The three-day conference drew speakers and guests from all around the world and was far-reaching in scope, examining the character of the shapeshifter in a broad perspective, just as this book has tried to do. A partial list of the topics under discussion at the conference reveals its diversity: mythology and folkloric beliefs; historical medical discourses about shapeshifters; issues of body images; the monstrosity of shapeshifters; paranormal romance novels featuring shapeshifters; teen shapeshifters; role playing and gaming; alternate worlds, alternate realities; DNA gambles and gene manipulations; magic, transformation and the body; and cultural shapeshifting, mimicry, integration and post-colonial identity. Clearly, the shapeshifter archetype continues to transcend all aspects of our lives, whether we recognize it or not.

Guy Savelli is an example of an unrecognized shapeshifter. Savelli is a martial arts Master of Kun Tao, a form of kung fu. Over the years, Savelli has worked with the U.S. military, training Special Forces, Special Ops and Navy SEAL teams in the secrets of his martial arts. He impresses upon his students that accomplishment in martial arts relies on one's mental abilities as much as, if not more than, physical abilities. In the 1970s Savelli was part of the U.S. Army Intelligence's secret experimentations with psychic powers to enhance military intelligence-gathering capabilities, as well as overall operational effectiveness. In these experiments, Savelli reportedly knocked down a goat in another room 30 metres (100 ft) away, by slowing its heart

rate, using only his mind. The experiments became the subject of Jon Ronson's 2004 book *The Men Who Stare at Goats*, which was later made into a TV series in Britain and a movie.

And Master Savelli is also a shapeshifter. He teaches and practises a technique he calls 'the change'. The easiest way to explain it is to say that, in times of great stress, anger or danger, a change comes over the person displaying itself to others as something inhuman, something animal – think of the Norse berserkers, or the Incredible Hulk. Savelli says, 'You feel huge, it's like venom comes out of you. When you change like that, people run.' One of Savelli's students writes about a tense situation that caused 'the change':

This is very hard to explain. Mr Savelli changed. His physical appearance took on the form of a leopard – he didn't grow hair or claws – but his facial structure changed. His eyes, his whole countenance, and the feeling I felt is best explained like this: If you were placed in a room with no exits and someone dropped a leopard into the same room, that's the feeling. I found myself trembling, and I wasn't in any danger, physically. Needless to say, the persons that this energy was directed towards started back-pedaling and apologizing all over themselves. And then it was over.¹

There is so much in that story that rings true for other shapeshifter stories, both those of myth as well as those told by people who have had encounters with shapeshifters. As shown in this book, reports of shapeshifters continue to come to us from all parts of the globe: shapeshifting shamans in Africa, skinwalkers among the Diné, 'werewolf' serial killers, reptilian alien shapeshifting world leaders and communities of vampires. What are we to make of them?

For long-ago peoples, believing in evil spirits and creatures such as vampires and werewolves helped them explain why and how people got sick or why natural disasters and freak accidents sometimes happened. Their scientific understanding hadn't advanced far enough to discover the real reasons these

things happened, and they needed some kind of explanation, so vampires and werewolves were quite useful as a scapegoat.²

We may no longer need such scapegoats, yet even with our modern scientific understanding of such events, the shapeshifter character endures. Throughout the ages, in every culture, from ancient, primitive cultures right up to today's modern society, there have been reports of shapeshifter encounters. Of course, not everyone has believed in the reality of shapeshifters. In fact, most people cannot support the idea that a human could turn himself into a wolf, or a bat, or any other creature at will. Still, the very thought of such a transformation resonates within all of us, whether we believe it could happen or not.

We have seen repeatedly how the shapeshifter archetype can be an imaginary wish fulfilment for personal transformation. But even if imaginary, the shapeshifter can mentally encourage and empower us towards transformation. As *Harry Potter* author J. K. Rowling wrote in her 2008 *Very Good Lives: The Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination*, 'We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better.' And with the 'power to imagine better' comes the power to change for the better.

The shapeshifter archetype continues to be an element, not only in some of the more obscure religions of the world, but even in Christianity and Islam, where Jesus is transfigured, and an eternal life awaits those faithful departed who have slipped out of their mortal bodies and taken on a spirit form. The shapeshifter continues to inspire and offer hope to those dealing with issues of gender identity, and to those who are disaffected with their place in society and yearn for a new identity, a new start. Deeply embedded in our consciousness, the shapeshifter archetype remains an important part of our psyches, and it is only natural that its manifestation will continue to be seen in books, movies, games and even consumer products.

It is easy to dismiss reports of shapeshifters as rumour, superstition or 'fake news', but such a casual dismissal contradicts the testimonies of those who have had shapeshifter experiences or, at

minimum, believe that shapeshifters exist, even if they have not met one in the flesh. Our world is hardwired to science and technology, which, for all the benefits they have brought to humanity, have also enslaved us to technology, to the machine. We are lucky if we look up from our mobile phones in time to see the bus bearing down on us. Perhaps we need to step back from all that we know as commonplace, all that we perceive as true, and acknowledge, as English playwright Eden Phillpotts wrote, 'The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper.'

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